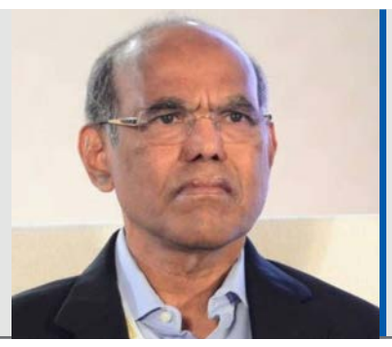
NATION

Govt must release white paper on freebies: Ex-RBI guv

≫ Page: 4 ≪



BUSINESS

Middle East crisis: Foreign investors turn net sellers

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

KKR sneak home by one run against RCB

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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Modi will end democracy: INDIA bloc

Mallikarjun Kharge alleges BJP wants to scare INDIA and hence got Soren & Kejri arrested

RANCHI/NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday claimed that democracy will end in the country if the "Modi-Shah sarkar" returns to power and accused the ruling party of telling lies.

He attacked BJP and asserted that the 'Shakti' of the INDIA is so strong that the people of BJP cannot break our 'Shakti'.

"They are trying to scare us. But we will not get scared if Hemant Soren is sent to jail for refusing to part ways with the INDIA," Kharge said while addressing the INDIA bloc rally.

He further said that the BJP would be wiped out if it continued to terrorise tribals.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi is saying that even Dr Ambekdar can't change the Constitution. These are his words, not mine... If it is true why do your MPs and MLAs say that give us a two-thirds majority, we will change the Constitution... Anantkumar Hedge (MP from Karnataka) says we want 400 seats to change the Constitution. These are their words," he said.

AAP leader Sanjay Singh said that when BJP speaks about corruption it seems like "Osama Bin Laden and Gabbar Singh are speaking about non-violence."

Singh attacked Modi and said Modi's washing powder cleans all corruption. Delhi Chief Minister's Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal and former Jharkhand Chief Minister Kalpana Soren attended a rally in Jharkhand's Ranchi.

Two empty chairs were kept at the rally for jailed Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and Jharkhand ex-CM Hemant Soren, in Ranchi on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

'BJP wants to kill my husband by denying him insulin'

Sunita on accused the Centre of denying insulin to her diabetic husband, and alleged that it wants to kill him. "His food is under camera observation; he is denied insulin. He is a sugar patient who has been on insulin for the last 12 years; he needs 50 units of insulin daily," Sunita said.

Jungle Raj taking place: BJP on Cong-RJD clash

BJP on Sunday took a swipe at the INDIA over a clash during the Opposition grouping's rally, calling it a display of 'Jungle Raj', and said workers of the Opposition parties clashed because they have no common mission and vision for the country.

BJP's reaction came after a clash took place reportedly between workers of the RJD and the Congress in the midst of the rally over the candidature of KN Tripathi from Chatra. —*PTI*

Tihar seeking diabetologist: AAP on Kejri's sugar row

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Delhi Cabinet Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj Sunday alleged that Tihar authorities have now requested a diabetologist from AIIMS in contradiction of their earlier stance of adequate medical facilities for diabetics being present in the prison.

"Yesterday (20 April), the Director General (Prisons) wrote to AIIMS, asking for a diabetologist to be posted at Tihar. Kejriwal has been lodged at Tihar for nearly 20 days and they are asking for a diabetologist only now," Bharadwaj said at a press conference here.

Tihar administration responded to Bharadwaj's charge and said appropriate senior specialists from AIIMS provided consultation to Kejriwal through video conference on Saturday.

"After a 40-minute detailed consultation, Kejriwal was assured that there was no serious concern and was advised to continue with the prescribed medicines, which will be evaluated and reviewed regularly," a jail official said. — *PTI*

Atishi and AAP supporters carry 'insulin' during a protest over Tihar's alleged failure in providing insulin to Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

IF CONG & ALLIES WIN, THERE WILL BE RIOTS: SHAH

KATIHAR, 21 APRIL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday charged Congress-led Opposition with being soft on terror and indifferent towards the uplift of deprived castes, and alleged that their return to power could cause "riots, atrocities and poverty".

Addressing an election rally in the Katihar Lok Sabha constituency of Bihar, the former BJP president also credited his party with having given the nation, in Narendra Modi, its "first OBC Prime Minister" who has "put an end" to dynasty politics. "Modi wiped out Naxalism and reined in terrorism. When Congress was in power, terrorists struck at will and nobody could muster the courage to retaliate. In contrast, the attacks in Uri and Pulwama were followed quickly by surgical strikes and Balakot airstrikes. Our security personnel went across the border with Pakistan and the terrorists were bumped off in their own hideouts," said Shah. —*PTI*

PHOTO: SALAR

6 of Hubballi family drown while trying to save child

KARWAR, 21 APRIL

Six members of a family who were on a trip drowned in the Kali river in Akoda of Biryampali village in Uttar Kannada district on Sunday. The deceased are Nazir Ahmed Chaman Saab Honnambal, 40, a resident of Iswara Nagar; along with his children Alpiya, 10; Mohin, 6; Ifra, 15, and his sister Reshma Unnisa Taufeek Ahmed, 38, and her son Abid, 12. Eyewitnesses recounted that the mishap took place when one of the children from the group had gone down to swim in the river, and she washed away. Seeing this, the other five family members jumped into the water to save her. However, they all drowned due to the water convulsions. The Dandeli rural police visited the spot. They initiated the rescue operation and lifted the bodies with the help of Jungle Lodge and locals. Following the necessary procedures, the bodies were transported to the public hospital for post-mortem examinations. —*Salar News*

EC files FIR against K'taka BJP man, for carrying ₹2 cr

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

An FIR was registered on Sunday against BJP Office Secretary Lokesh Ambekallu and two others for illegally carrying Rs 2 crore cash in a car, office of Chief Electoral Officer said. The matter came to light on Saturday when Static Surveillance Team (SST) of Chamarajpet intercepted a car carrying cash of Rs 2 crore and intimated income tax officials. According to EC officials, Income Tax department summoned office bearers of BJP and concluded that there was no violation under IT laws as the source of the money was legitimate. But as per ECI (Election Commission of India) direction, cash more than 10,000 given to party functionaries and candidates' agents for political activities shall be done through cheque or online mode. ECI had also advised political parties not to carry huge amounts of cash. As there is a violation of ECI directions and the recipient's list was not produced, based on the suspicion that the money may be used for inducements in election, an FIR was registered, it said. —*PTI*

MAHAVIR JAYANTI

Members of the Jain community organise a procession from Town Hall to Freedom Park on Mahavir Jayanti in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

73 trains hit as ryots sit on tracks for 5th day

AMBALA, 21 APRIL

As many as 73 trains on the Ambala-Amritsar route were cancelled on Sunday as farmers continued to squat on tracks at the Shambhu railway station in Punjab's Patiala district for the fifth day, officials said.

The protesters have been demanding the release of three farmers arrested by the Haryana Police during the ongoing stir. The cancellation of trains over the last five days was causing financial losses, besides inconveniencing passengers, they said.

Many trains were also being diverted due to the farmers' protest, they added. The farmers have been protesting under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) (SKM) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) in Patiala district's Shambhu.

They began their protest for the release of arrested farmers on Wednesday by squatting on the tracks on the Ambala Ludhiana-Amritsar route in Shambhu near the Punjab-Haryana border. Farmer leaders have said the protest will continue until the three farmers are released.

SKM and KMM are spearheading the 'Delhi Chalo' march by farmers to press the government to accept their demands, including legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price for crops. The farmers have been staying put at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points. —*PTI*

Farmers sit on tracks during a protest at Shambhu border **PHOTO: PTI**

Tribals threaten to boycott polls over lack of booth

MYSURU, 21 APRIL

The tribal community of Channagundi Hadi (colony) in Saraguru taluk, Mysuru district, has issued a warning to boycott the upcoming Lok Sabha election scheduled for 26 April if a polling booth is not set up in their village.

"We have always voted in our village and have no intention of travelling to another city to exercise our democratic right," a villager said. Highlighting the historical context, a community elder said, "We have been voting in Channagundi Hadi since the time of our grandfather. However, the polling station was recently relocated to the neighbouring village of Aralahalli.

"It has become very difficult, particularly for the elderly, disabled, pregnant women, and others who find it difficult to travel the approximately 5km to Aralahalli to cast their vote," he added. Recounting their previous experience during the last Assembly election, a community member shared, "We had to travel to Aralahalli to cast our votes, but no transportation facilities were provided. Despite our appeals to the officials, our concerns were ignored."

Adding to their grievances, there are allegations of irregularities in the voter list, with deceased individuals reportedly listed as alive and living community members allegedly removed from the voter rolls. —*Salar News*

Nadda meets Neha's family, demands CBI probe

BJP President JP Nadda with Neha's father Niranjan Hiremath in Hubballi on Sunday **PHOTO: ANI**

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

BJP President JP Nadda on Sunday went to meet the family of Neha Hiremath, who was murdered on her college campus. He demanded a CBI probe into the murder.

"We condemn the statements made by chief minister Siddaramaiah and state home minister G Parameshwara. Their remarks epitomise appeasement...," he added.

Accusing INDIA as a group of dynastic politics, he said the members of 'Ghamandia' (arrogant) parties are either on bail or in jail.

He said if there was one party which has respect for democracy, it is BJP as it allows ordinary people to rise and become leaders.

"On the one hand, there is 'Ghamandia' alliance in the name of India and on the other, there is a democratic BJP which allows people from ordinary families to rise and become leaders," Nadda said, addressing leaders of various communities here. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

BJP, Muslim outfits call for bandh today

Karnataka BJP on Sunday called for statewide protest on Monday condemning Neha Hiremath's murder. Muslim organisations here have given a call for a 'bandh' too. Dharwad based Anjuman-e-Islam president Esmail Tamatgar said all the businessmen from Muslim community will observe bandh from 10 am to 3 pm tomorrow to offer their condolence

YOUTHS HELD FOR POST ON NEHA'S MURDER

HUBBALLI, 21 APRIL

Police have arrested two youths who justified the murder of Neha Hiremath allegedly by Fayaz Khondunaik on their social media handles.

The accused from Dharwad were arrested on Saturday after a few pro-Hindu activists lodged a complaint alleging that the duo had posted contents claiming that Hiremath and Khondunaik were in relationship.

They allegedly uploaded pictures of the victim Hiremath and Khondunaik with a caption, "Neha Fayaz true love, justice for love".

Meanwhile, Hubballi Dharwad City Police Commissioner Renuka Sukumar appreciated the police team that successfully nabbed the accused in the recent murder case of a 23-year-old student college student inside the campus here, officials said on Sunday.

Sukumar also gave away Rs 25,000 as cash prize apart from appreciation letters to each member of the team, they said. —*PTI*

ANNOUNCES UGC

UGs with 75% marks can now do PhD

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Students with four-year undergraduate degrees can now directly appear for NET and pursue PhD, according to University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Jagadesh Kumar.

To pursue a PhD with or without a Junior Research Fellowship (JRF), the candidates will require a minimum of 75 per cent marks or equivalent grades in their four-year undergraduate course.

So far, a candidate for the National Eligibility Test (NET) needed a master's degree with a minimum of 55 per cent marks.

The exam this year will be conducted in offline mode instead of a Computer Based Test. Tests for all subjects will be conducted on 16 June.

"The candidates with four-year undergraduate degrees can now directly pursue PhD and appear for NET. Such candidates are allowed to appear (for tests) in a subject in which they want to pursue a PhD irrespective of the discipline in which they have obtained the four-year bachelor's degree," Kumar said.

A relaxation of five per cent marks or its equivalent grade may be allowed for those belonging to SC, ST, OBC (non-creamy layer), differently-abled, economically weaker sections and other categories of candidates as per the decision of UGC from time to time, he added.

PHOTO: PTI

"Candidates having passed a four-year or eight-semester bachelor's degree programme should have a minimum of 75 per cent marks in aggregate or its equivalent grade on a point scale wherever the grading system is followed," UGC chairman said.

UGC-NET is an exam to determine the eligibility of Indian nationals for the "award of Junior Research Fellowship and appointment as assistant professor", "appointment as assistant professor and admission to PhD" and "admission to PhD only" in Indian universities and colleges. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

KMF to sponsor Ireland, Scotland cricket teams

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

Karnataka Milk Federation, the state-owned dairy cooperative federation with brand name 'Nandini', will sponsor Scotland and Ireland cricket teams in the 2024 T20 World Cup, a move which has come under criticism in some quarters."We already have stores in the Middle East. We are selling our sweets in America," Jagadish explained. Information technology industry veteran and former Chief Financial Officer of Infosys TV Mohandas Pai criticised the move. In a post on 'X', he said: "What a big shame! Why are they using the money belonging to the farmers of Karnataka, paid by consumers who are Kannadigas, to sponsor foreign teams? What value will it deliver? Pay poor farmers better. Ssiddaramaiah @ DKShivakumar this is a waste for a largely Karnataka based co/op!" *—PTI*

Fire breaks out at paper goods factory in Chickpet

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

A major fire erupted in paper goods manufacturing unit located in Chickpet, Bengaluru on Sunday. The blaze had originated in Balaji Plastic building on Sethurao Road, damaging the third floor of the unit. An alert passer-by spotted the flames and promptly alerted the fire department. Three fire engines were swiftly dispatched to the scene. Fire fighters battled the blaze for over three hours. The unit specialised in the production of paper plates and glasses, contributing significantly to the local market. There were no casualties as no one was present at that time. The investigations are still on to probe fire's origin. *—Salar News*

Cops start search op amid suspected naxal sightings

UDUPI, 21 APRIL

Amid suspected naxal sightings in and around the areas of State bordering Kerala, the police have launched combing operations in the neighbouring areas and made adequate arrangements for Lok Sabha elections. The general elections in State will be held in two phases on 26 April and 7 May for its 28 constituencies. Speaking to PTI videos, Arun K, Superintendent of Police Udupi said that some days ago, there were suspected naxal sightings in and around the State-Kerala border. However, around five-six years ago, there were no naxal sightings on this side of State.

The officer further said it has been ensured that all the naxal-affected polling booths will be given central paramilitary force protection on the day of polling. "As of now, we don't expect any issues but we have made adequate arrangements to ensure peaceful elections," he said. *—PTI*

Fatal accident on M'luru-B'luru NH, 1 dead

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

Tragedy struck on the Mangaluru-Bengaluru National Highway as a pedestrian, Nagaraja, 55, lost his life after being struck by a bike near Thumbay. The incident occurred when a bike ridden by Deepak Shetty, travelling from Mangaluru to BC Road, collided with him. Both Nagaraja and Deepak sustained serious injuries in the accident. Nagaraja was rushed to a nearby hospital with severe head, face, and leg injuries, where Nagaraja later succumbed to his wounds. The mishap is suspected to have been caused by negligent riding on Deepak's part. Authorities from the Melkar traffic police have initiated an investigation into the incident. The case has been registered. *—Salar News*

Hubballi murder: Accused's dad says sorry to Neha's kin

'Want my son to be given maximum punishment for his act'

HUBBALLI, 21 APRIL

Demanding maximum punishment for his son, the father of 23-year-old Fayaz, who allegedly killed Congress councillor's daughter in Hubballi, has apologised to the victim's family. He said his son should be given strict punishment.

Baba Saheb Subani, a school teacher and Fayaz's father told media on Saturday that he came to know about the incident around 6pm on Thursday and was shocked and shattered with his son's act.

"She was like my daughter," he said with teary eyes.

Subani said that he and his wife have been living separately for the past six years and that Fayaz stayed with his mother and called him whenever he needed money. He last spoke to his son about three months ago.

Fayaz's father recalled that around eight months ago, Neha's family had called him to inform that his son was troubling their daughter.

Admitting that his son made a mistake, he said that Fayaz and Neha loved each other and were in a relationship.

"Fayaz told me he wanted to marry her but I refused," he added.

Condemning his son's act, Fayaz's father said that no one should commit any such atrocities against women.

Family members mourn at Neha Hiremath's funeral in Hubballi *PHOTO: PTI*

"I request the people of Karnataka to forgive me. My son has done wrong. He will be punished by the law of the land and I welcome it. My town has got a black mark because of my son. People of Munavalli (Fayaz's hometown) please forgive me. You raised us. Please forgive me," he cried with folded hands.

However, the victim's family has been demanding that the accused be hanged to death and only then will their daughter's soul rest in peace. They maintained that their daughter was not in a relationship with Fayaz and said the accused stabbed Neha because she rejected his proposal.

There were protests in several parts of the state demanding capital punishment for Fayaz, who has been arrested in connection with the incident that occurred on 18 April.

The alleged murder of the daughter of the city corporation councillor on her college campus has sparked widespread condemnation and protests. *—PTI*

STATE NOT BOTHERED ABOUT ANYTHING: BSY

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

After Hubballi murder case, former chief minister and BJP leader BS Yediyurappa said Congress government is not bothered about anything.

"They are not taking it seriously," he said.

Speaking on the case, BJP State President BY Vijayendra told ANI that, it looks like a love jihad case. So rather than getting into the investigation, the Chief Minister is trying to protect the culprits.

"Congress government does not care about anything. Earlier, when a blast took place in Mangaluru, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said it was a small stray incident and not a terrorist attack. Later when an investigation was carried out, many people were arrested.

On Saturday, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that the murder is not a case of "love jihad" as alleged by BJP. *—ANI*

BRIBERY ALLEGED

Congress files EC complaint against Yaduveer

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

Congress has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against BJP's Mysuru- Kodagu Lok Sabha candidate Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar for his alleged involvement in bribery in violation of the Model Code of Conduct.

In a letter to State Chief Electoral Officer on Saturday, KPCC alleged that Wadiyar has engaged in actions that egregiously contravene the MCC, posing a severe threat to the fairness and transparency of the electoral process.

"Wadiyar has orchestrated a meeting with several influential personalities on social media platforms, with the explicit purpose of soliciting their support and influence for his electoral campaign. During this meeting, which was clandestinely conducted, Wadiyar made attempts to sway these influencers by offering them materialistic inducements, including personalised notebooks, pens, chocolates, sarees, and sweets," it alleged.

The letter stated that the most alarming aspect of this meeting was the "brazen distribution" of substantial amounts of money to these influencers in exchange for their unequivocal support and promotion of his candidacy.

Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar *PHOTO: PTI*

- KPCC alleged that Wadiyar has engaged in actions that egregiously contravene the MCC, posing a severe threat to the fairness and transparency of the electoral process

Congress urged the poll body to initiate a thorough and impartial investigation into this matter and take stringent action against those found guilty of violating the MCC and relevant electoral laws to ensure that the electoral process remains free, fair, and untainted by corrupt practices. *—PTI*

Sumalatha to back HDK in Mandya

MYSURU, 21 APRIL

MP Sumalatha Ambareesh clarified her stance on campaigning for the upcoming elections and extended her support to BJP's Mandya candidate HD Kumaraswamy.

"I have always supported BJP, especially in constituencies where the late Ambareesh had a significant following. Similarly, I extend my support to Kumaraswamy as Mandya candidate. I will campaign wherever the party directs me to," stated Sumalatha Ambareesh.

Reflecting on her recent interaction with Kumaraswamy, she revealed, "Kumaraswamy visited our residence a week ago seeking cooperation. I not only joined BJP but also voluntarily gave up my seat. What greater cooperation than relinquishing a seat I had won?"

Sumalatha Ambareesh *PHOTO: ANI*

Commenting on actor Darshan's involvement in campaigning for Congress candidate in Malavalli, she clarified that Darshan's campaign choices are personal.

"Reacting to the recent tragic incident of a female student's murder in Hubballi, she said, "Murder should not be associated with any community. Targeting an entire community for the actions of one individual is unjust.

She urged for a non-politicised approach to the matter. *—Salar News*

PRAYERS FOR RAIN

Muslims take part in Salatul-Istisqa, a special prayer for rain, at Neelasandra Idgah maidan, in Bengaluru on Sunday. Shantinagar MLA NA Haris (far right) also took part *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

VIJAYENDRA SLAMS RAGA FOR GIVING UP AMETHI FIGHT

DAKSHINA KANNADA, 21 APRIL

Targeting Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for not fighting Lok Sabha polls from Amethi constituency, Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra questioned the intentions of Wayanad MP, saying that he could have opted for any other seat rather than contesting from a minority-dominated constituency.

On Rahul Gandhi's claim that BJP would not win more than 150 seats, Vijayendra said, "Instead of focusing on how many seats BJP is going to win, he should focus on his party."

Earlier, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday claimed that BJP would not win more than 150 seats in the Lok Sabha elections.

"These BJP people have kept saying that they will secure this many or that many seats, let me make it clear, they (BJP) won't get more than 150 seats. Not even a single seat more than 150," he said while addressing in Bhagalpur.

Speaking on Rahul Gandhi's promises to abolish Agnipath scheme if INDIA bloc is voted to power and that "India does not need two kinds of martyrs", Karnataka BJP President Vijayendra said Congress is trying to bluff through its manifesto and people are well aware of this fact.

Those recruited under the scheme are called 'Agniveers'. *—ANI*

'Muslims must vote in large numbers to save Constitution'

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

Amid the Opposition's concerns over threat to nation's democracy and growing human rights violations against minorities, Muslim leaders gathered at Salar auditorium and called for setting aside divisive Hindu-Muslim politics and uniting to safeguard the Constitution. The leaders urged Muslims to come out and vote in large numbers on polling days. Former deputy chairman of Rajya Sabha K Rahman Khan said a united action can safeguard democracy.

"Today, there is a need to save the country's democracy and Constitution. This can be done only if people come out in large numbers and vote," he said.

"We are over 22 crore Muslims and have great power electorally. We should now stop thinking negatively and use this power," he added. Echoing Rahman's call, former MP Mohammad Adeeb said there is an atmosphere of fear everywhere.

"The situation in the country has worsened, and Lok Sabha elections will decide whether democracy will remain in the country or not. To save India, Muslims must not indulge in divisive politics. Unitedly we can save India by voting. Looking at the past, learning from our mistakes and making a sketch of the future. Stop pulling each other's feet and learn to hold hands. Don't get bogged down in small issues he said.

He claimed atrocities against Muslims have increased. "Muslims are marginalised, and the reason for this is ourselves," he added. Former Karnataka minister Roshan Baig appealed to the Muslims to come out and vote too. "Don't neglect. This is the need of the hour," he said. *—Salar Newsw*

Centre's policies are anti-South: Revanth

BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Sunday accused the ruling BJP government of displaying a discriminatory attitude towards South India, alleging that the party's policies are inherently "anti-South Indian."

Reddy, claimed that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) directly intervenes to thwart investments in South Indian states, diverting them to states like Gujarat. He asserted, "If any (MNC) comes to South India, they are directly threatened by the PMO office and asked to shift to Gujarat or other North India states."

Highlighting what he sees as a pattern of neglect, Reddy criticised the allocation of key portfolios in the central government, stating, "Have you ever seen in this country where for the entirety of Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh which has 70 seats only two cabinet ministerial posts have been given?" Reddy also predicted electoral consequences for BJP, suggesting that the party's stronghold in North India wouldn't translate to success in South India and that BJP will not even cross 220 seats. "In the 131 seats of five states-- Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh along with Lakshadweep-- BJP will not get more than 20 seats."

Congress Bengaluru Central candidate Mansoor Ali Khan with Telangana CM *PHOTO: SALAR*

Reddy noted that the BJP is vying for just 300 out of the remaining 412 seats across India, leaving the rest to its allies. He suggested that despite a 70 per cent chance of success, this strategy could yield only around 200 seats. He emphasised that BJP's electoral performance in 2019, particularly in North India, cannot be replicated. On the influence of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), Reddy suggested a complex electoral dynamic, alleging a tacit understanding between AIMIM and BJP. *—Salar News*

LAST LEG OF CAMPAIGN

Mansoor dreams big for B'luru Central

VAISHNAVI GOPALRAJ
BENGALURU, 21 APRIL

With just four days left for Lok Sabha elections in Bengaluru, the battle in BJP belt of Bengaluru Central is getting heated. Congress' new candidate Mansoor Ali Khan got down on the battlefield on Sunday. Mansoor was welcome with flowers by his supporters at Shantinagar (Ward No. 117) at 4pm. Salar News captured the vibrant atmosphere in the constituency as Mansoor met the public amid chants of "ee bari Congress sarakara" (This time Congress will win).

Mansoor was accompanied by BDA Chairman Nalapad Ahmed Haris and State youth Congress President Mohammed Nalapad. Many of his supporters said they see Mansoor as a beacon of change.

During the rally, attendees pointed out how incumbent BJP MP PC Mohan is barely seen in his constituency over the past 15 years. Vijay, an auto driver from Austin Town, told Salar News that he was unhappy with Mohan's lack of concern during the Covid pandemic. He recalled how he had to wait for ration for nearly two days. The crowd echoed Vijay's sentiments. Many spoke about how Mansoor could contribute to healthcare and education sectors since he is an educationist for decades.

Bengaluru Central Congress candidate Mansoor Ali Khan with MLA NA Haris, Youth Congress President Mohammad Nalapad during campaigning at Shantinagar in Bengaluru on Sunday *PHOTO: SALAR*

Simon, a first-time voter from Austin Town, fondly recalled how health minister Dinesh Gundu Rao and Harris provided crucial assistance to his family.

Their unwavering support and constant contact left a lasting impression on him. Simon said he intends to support Mansoor. Simon says he recently discussed Mansoor's background with his friends.

"I checked Mansoor's background and discovered his significant contribution to education. This revelation instilled hope in me, particularly regarding educational opportunities."

Bengaluru Central was delineated from Assembly segments of Bengaluru South and Bengaluru North during the 2008 delimitation, with its inaugural election held in 2009. Since then, BJP has made Bengaluru Central its stronghold. *—Salar News*

How has your campaign been so far?
Though the clock is ticking, I'm very positive that I will win Bengaluru Central. As an educationist, I have got positive response from the people. We have to wait for the big day.

As a new face, how are you introducing yourself and what was people's reaction?
Initially, there was scepticism surrounding my candidacy, as people were unsure about my background and capabilities. However, I can be seen as a beacon of hope to improve civic conditions.

Congress lost thrice. What difference will you make?
The seat is competitive. However, going by people's response to PC Mohan, there is hope that we will get the seat. If we look at 2023 Assembly results, we received more votes than BJP.

Bad weather disrupts Shah's Darjeeling visit

DARJEELING, 21 APRIL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday could not attend a scheduled election rally in Darjeeling town of West Bengal as his helicopter failed to land due to inclement weather, a party leader said. Shah was scheduled to address the rally in support of BJP candidate for Darjeeling Lok Sabha seat, Raju Bista. "Amit Shah ji's visit to Darjeeling had to be cancelled as his helicopter failed to land in Darjeeling because of bad weather," he said. Later, while talking to reporters, Bista, who is the local MP, said Shah might come to the hills at a later date before Darjeeling Lok Sabha seat goes to polls on 26 April. Local BJP leaders addressed the gathering. *—PTI*

WB min files plaint against Malviya over online post

KOLKATA, 21 APRIL

West Bengal minister Chandrima Bhattacharya has lodged a police complaint against BJP's IT cell Head Amit Malviya over a social media post by him, a Trinamool Congress (TMC) source said on Sunday. The post, the veracity of which was not verified by PTI, alleged that TMC Supremo Mamata Banerjee used an invective against Prime Minister Narendra Modi at an election rally. Citing media reports, Bhattacharya said in the complaint filed at Gariahat police station in Kolkata on Saturday that Malviya shared a post on his social media handle, which she claimed was derogatory and insulted the West Bengal chief minister. Claiming that the social media post maligned the image and reputation of Banerjee, the complaint said that it was a "false imputation." It was also alleged in the complaint by the Minister of state for Finance (independent charge), that with the Lok Sabha polls underway, the post was made with the "intention to affect the result of an election."*—PTI*

Tharoor booked for false campaign against Rajeev

T'PURAM, 21 APRIL

Senior Congress leader and Lok Sabha candidate Shashi Tharoor has been booked for allegedly carrying out a false campaign against union minister and rival candidate Rajeev Chandrasekhar, police said here on Sunday. The case was registered by the cyber police here on 15 April but its details were revealed only today. According to police, the case against Tharoor was registered based on a complaint lodged by BJP leader JR Padmakumar who accused Tharoor of carrying out a false campaign against Chandrasekhar during a television programme. The complainant alleged that Tharoor, during the programme, had made defamatory statements against Chandrasekhar with regard to influencing voters of coastal regions in the upcoming Lok Sabha election. Tharoor, is yet to react on the registration of the case. *—PTI*

Bihar's lone NDA Muslim MP joins RJD

PATNA, 21 APRIL

Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) MP Mehboob Ali Kaiser, the lone Muslim to have been elected to the Lok Sabha from BJP-led NDA in Bihar, joined RJD on Sunday, amid the elections. Kaiser, who sided with former Union minister Pashupati Kumar Paras when the latter split LJP, and was denied a ticket this time by Chirag Paswan despite efforts to seek rapprochement, joined RJD in the presence of its leader Tejashwi Yadav. Born into the family that ruled the erstwhile princely state of Simri Bakhtiyarpur in Saharsa district, he started his political career with Congress and headed the party's state unit till 2013. He joined LJP in 2014 and won the Khagaria seat, which he retained five years later. *—PTI*

Modi, RaGa covering up Kerala's progress: Vijayan

'PM, RaGa speak on same lines when talking about Kerala'

KASARAGOD, 21 APRIL

Pinarayi Vijayan said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had mentioned the other day that corruption thrives in Kerala like in Bihar and that Rahul is yet to prove of being capable of leading the country *PHOTO: PTI*

With the crucial Lok Sabha polls just five days away in the State, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Sunday intensified his attack against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi accusing them of attempting to cover up the progresses achieved by the state with "lies".

Modi and Gandhi speak on the same lines when talking against Kerala, he told a press conference in Kanhangadu here. "A strange phenomenon is happening now in which Prime Minister and the all India leader of the main Opposition party are trying in unison to cover up the state (Kerala) and the progress it achieved with lies," he alleged.

Targeting Modi for his recent remarks against the state, Vijayan said the Prime Minister had mentioned the other day that corruption thrives in Kerala like in Bihar.

Through the statement, Modi is insulting two states at one go, he said.

Rejecting Modi's charge, the Left leader said it is well known that Kerala is the least corrupt state in the country and the recognition in this regard was given to it by the recent India Corruption Survey jointly conducted by the Centre for Media Studies, Transparency International and Local Circles. Continuing his fierce criticism against Rahul Gandhi, the Marxist veteran said the Congress leader is yet to take a strong stand to convince people that he is capable of leading the country.

"What more the country can expect from Rahul Gandhi who fled north India and came to Wayanad for contesting the second consecutive term without even trying to oppose Narendra Modi and the Sangh Parivar, whom he claims as his main opponents?" Vijayan asked.

He said the Left, right from the beginning of the election campaign, has upheld a concrete approach to free the country from the clutches of Sangh Parivar. *—PTI*

- Vijayan said that the Left, right from the beginning of the election campaign, has upheld a concrete approach to free the country from the clutches of Sangh Parivar adding that it is well known that Kerala is the least corrupt state in the country

AHEAD OF POLLS

Setback for Cong in Wayanad as Gen Secy joins BJP

WAYANAD, 21 APRIL

PM Sudhakaran *PHOTO: PTI*

In yet another blow to Congress amid the ongoing Lok Sabha polls in the country, Wayand district committee General Secretary PM Sudhakaran quit the party and joined BJP on Sunday.

After joining BJP, PM Sudhakaran said that Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi was "not even accessible" to him. "How can such a politician be accessible to the common man?," he added.

Admiring Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his vision for development, Sudhakaran said he wants Kerala BJP Chief to emerge victorious from the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat. "BJP is a party that has more relevance in today's society. For the development projects of PM Modi to be implemented, K Surendran should be elected as the MP from Wayanad and I will strive towards that. If the people of Wayanad elect state president of BJP, K Surendran, the people of Wayanad are going to benefit from it," said Sudhakaran at a function held where a retired forest range officer Shashi Kumar and civil engineer Prajeesh joined BJP.

All 20 constituencies of Kerala will go to the poll on 26 April in the second phase of the Lok Sabha election.

Gandhi is pitted against CPI's Annie Raja and BJP's state President, K Surendran.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Gandhi won from Wayanad with a huge margin of over 4.31 lakh votes- the highest margin in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in Kerala. He secured 64.94 per cent vote share, defeating LDF candidate PP Suneer.

The NDA had fielded BDJ (S) leader Tushar Vellapally, who secured just around 78,000 votes, which accounted for a mere 7.25 per cent.

The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) won 19 out of 20 seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. *—ANI*

POLITICAL SLUGFEST

BJP targeting me, Abhishek; we are not safe: Mamata

KUMARGANJ, 21 APRIL

Mamata Banerjee *PHOTO: PTI*

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday alleged that BJP is targeting her and her nephew and TMC National General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee and they do not feel safe.

Her allegation came a day after leader of Opposition in Assembly, Suvendu Adhikari, said that there would be a "big explosion on Monday which will shake TMC and its top brass". "But we are also not afraid of the saffron party's conspiracy. We urge everyone to be on guard against a conspiracy against TMC leaders and the people of West Bengal," she said, while addressing an election rally in Kumarganj in Balurghat Lok Sabha seat in favour of party candidate Biplab Mitra.

Responding to Adhikari's remark, TMC supremo said, "There is a traitor who joined BJP to protect his family and ill-gotten wealth. Let me tell him, his threat to trigger a chocolate bomb explosion is treated with contempt by us."

"We will counter him by bursting firecrackers. For us firecrackers are unravelling discrepancies in PM Care Fund and 'jumla' of crediting Rs 15 lakh in every citizen's bank account. He only peddles falsehood," she said.

On the change in colour of the Doordarshan logo, Banerjee accused the Narendra Modi government of painting independent institutions such as Doordarshan in saffron hues, stating that the BJP "appropriating the colour" was an insult to sacrifices made by monks and spiritual leaders of the country for ages.

She wondered how the logo of Doordarshan could be painted in saffron during elections, alleging it was done to suit BJP's "religion-based vote bank politics and agenda". *—PTI*

Cong candidate's nomination rejected due to BJP: Gohil

AHMEDABAD, 21 APRIL

Gujarat Congress Chief Shaktisinh Gohil on Sunday alleged the nomination form of the party's candidate from Surat Lok Sabha constituency was rejected at the behest of BJP which is "rattled" as it has sensed defeat in elections.

Terming the development as a "murder of democracy", Gohil said Congress will file a petition in the Gujarat High Court against Returning Officer's decision to cancel the nomination form of the party candidate Nilesh Kumbhani over alleged discrepancies in the signatures of proposers in the form.Congress is pushed out of the poll fray from the Surat constituency as the nomination form of Suresh Padsala, the substitute candidate from Surat, was also invalidated. In his order, Returning Officer Sourabh Pardhi said the four nomination forms submitted by Kumbhani and Padsala were rejected after prima facie, discrepancies were found in the signatures of the proposers, and they did not appear genuine.

He said the nomination form cannot be cancelled after the nomination form was filed solely on the proposers' claim that signatures in the form do not belong to them.

The proposers, in their affidavits, stated they had not signed the forms themselves, as per the Returning Officers Congress is contesting 24 of 26. seats while two constituencies are allotted to AAP as per the seat-sharing deal. *—PTI*

- He said the nomination form cannot be cancelled after the nomination form was filed solely on the proposers' claim

Sonia Gandhi *PHOTO: PTI*

LOSERS HAVE COME TO RS FROM R'THAN: PM MOCKS SONIA

JAIPUR, 21 APRIL

In a veiled attack on Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said those who cannot win elections have "fled the field" and have come to Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. Addressing an election rally in Rajasthan's Jalore, Modi said the country is punishing the Congress for its "sins" and the party that had once won 400 seats is unable to find candidates to contest 300 seats in this Lok Sabha election.

"Those who cannot contest elections, cannot win elections have fled the field. This time, they have come to Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. The condition of Congress is so bad," Modi said.

Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi is among the MPs elected to Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan in February. Several Congress veterans have not been fielded in this Lok Sabha election, but the party has rejected suggestions that they were shying away from contesting.

"In the first phase of voting, half of Rajasthan has punished Congress. Rajasthan, which is full of patriotism, knows that Congress can never make India strong," Modi said

He said the country does not want the conditions which existed before 2014 to return.

Modi was addressing the public meeting in Bhinmal in support of BJP candidate Lumbaram Chaudhary. *—PTI*

Plaint against Congress for remarks on Kangana

SHIMLA, 21 APRIL

Kangana Ranaut *PHOTO: PTI*

Himachal Pradesh BJP Sunday filed a complaint against Congress and the Hamirpur Youth Congress Club for allegedly portraying actor and BJP Lok Sabha candidate from Mandi, Kangana Ranaut, in a negative light by using pictures from her films.

BJP urged the Election Commission of India (ECI) to initiate appropriate legal action against them for using objectionable, scandalous and offensive language on social media.

In its complaint to the ECI, with copy to the Himachal Chief Electoral Officer, BJP alleged that Congress has directed its various wings to assassinate the character of Kangana on social media. Hamirpur Youth Congress Club has used a picture of Kangana from her "artistic pursuits" to portray her as a negative character and posted "derogatory double meaning remarks". *—PTI*

Congress a synonym for scams: Yogi

RAIPUR, 21 APRIL

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addresses a public meeting in Rajnandgaon district in Chattisgarh on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday hit out at Congress, claiming the grand old party is a synonym for scams, terrorism and Naxalism.

Addressing an election rally in Chhhattisgarh's Kabirdham district, he said wait of 500 years for Ram Lalla (installation of his idol) in Ayodhya ended because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Kabirdham district comes under the Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha constituency.

"Congress is a synonym for scams, terrorism and Naxalism. At the age when a tablet and a good book should be in the hands of youth and they should have the spirit to take the world ahead, the Congress handed over pistols in the hands of those youth. Congress instigated them to fight against the country in the name of Naxalism and terrorism," he claimed.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, people have seen the country changing in the last 10 years, he said.

Adityanath asked the gathering whether Congress could have given free ration to the people, built the Ram temple, reduced the problem of Naxalism. *—PTI*

RAGA'S PROMISE

Experts divided over scrapping Agniveer

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Agniveer model seeks to recruit soldiers for only four years, with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them in regular service *PHOTO: ANI*

Defence experts looked divided on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's promise to scrap the Agnipath or Agniveer scheme if INDIA bloc is voted to power after the Lok Sabha elections, with some calling the scheme was forcefully 'imposed' and others suggesting modifications to it.

Defence expert Major General GD Bakshi (R) said, "I have some reservations personally about this scheme. My suggestion is that instead of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, this scheme be appropriately tweaked after trials."

Wing Commander (Retd) Praful Bakshi said, "If some political leader is suggesting that they would reject it (Agniveer scheme), then it should be the voice of the public, saying it should be scrapped. Then it will be seen."

"But in our opinion, there is no need to scrap it," he added.

Another defence expert PK Sehgal, said there are a lot of drawbacks to this scheme.

Gandhi on Saturday spoke about promises made by Congress in its manifesto, like scrapping the 'Agniveer' scheme.

"(Prime Minister) Narendra Modi has implemented the 'Agniveer' scheme against the soldiers and Hindustan. This scheme is not being liked by any youth in Hindustan. As soon as our INDIA bloc government comes to power, we will throw this scheme out and finish it," Gandhi said while addressing a public rally in Bihar's Bhagalpur.

"There is no need for this scheme. India does not need two types of martyrs. Hindustan needs only one type of martyr. Every soldier should get the rank of martyr. Everyone should get the pension," he added. The Agnipath scheme was announced by the Centre in June 2022.

This model seeks to recruit soldiers for only four years, with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them in regular service.

Those recruited under the scheme are called 'Agniveers'. *—ANI*

BJP a cult worshipping Modi: Chidambaram

T'PURAM, 21 APRIL

P Chidambaram *PHOTO: PTI*

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Sunday lashed out at BJP-led NDA government and said the saffron party is no longer a political party but has become a cult which worships Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Targeting the Modi government, Chidambaram said there is a "grave erosion" of freedom of speech and expression happening under the ten years of Modi rule and urged the people to "restore democracy". He also assured that even though the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was not mentioned in Congress manifesto, it will be repealed once INDIA bloc comes to power.

Chidambaram also expressed hope that INDIA bloc will win all the 39 seats in Tamil Nadu and the one seat in Pondicherry where the elections were over.He claimed that "Modi ki guarantee" reminds everyone of the countries where there was cult worship.

"That cult worship in India has started gaining strength and will lead to dictatorship," he said. He alleged that there is a gross censorship of the freedom of expression under the ten year Modi rule.

"If Modi is voted back to power for the third time, he may amend the constitution... We have to restore democracy," Chidambaram said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Amritsar man sets pregnant wife on fire

AMRITSAR, 21 APRIL

A man allegedly tied his 23-year-old pregnant wife to bed and set her on fire in Bulley Nangal village of Baba Bakala area here, police on Sunday said. Sukhdev Singh burned his wife to death on Friday after a fight with her, they said.Sukhdev tied his wife Pinky, who was six months pregnant and was expecting twins, to a bed and set her on fire, they said. By the time police, which was informed by village Sarpanch about the incident, reached the house, the woman had died of burns. Sukhdev, who had fled after the act, has been arrested and booked for murder, police said.Sukhdev and Pinki had married around two and half years ago.—*PTI*

Five stabbed during fight inside bar in Kerala

T'PURAM, 21 APRIL

Five people were stabbed during a fight that ensued inside a beer parlour at Kazhakkootam near here last night, police said. The fight happened shortly after 11.30pm on Saturday after a gang had an altercation with another group, police added. Police said as per the initial information, a group of youngsters were planning to celebrate a friend's birthday by cutting a cake but another group tried to interfere. Sreekaryam residents Shalu, Sooraj, Vishak, Swaroop and Athul were stabbed and are admitted to the Medical College hospital here. Police said the condition of one person is serious."Three of the accused are in custody. The search is on for the rest of the accused," police said.—*PTI*

2 held for Odisha boat capsize that killed 8

BHUBANESWAR, 21 APRIL

The Odisha Police arrested two people in connection with the Mahanadi river boat capsize in Jharsuguda district in which eight people died, an official said. Police registered a suo moto case and arrested the duo after an investigation, he said."We have arrested two people on Saturday and forwarded them to court," Jharsuguda SP Parmar Smit Parshottamdas told PTI over phone. After completing formalities, the bodies of the deceased, hailing from Anjoripali village in Raigarh district of Chhattisgarh, have been handed over to their family members, he said. The injured people have also been sent home with the help of the local administration of Chhattisgarh, the SP said.—*PTI*

Bastar: 10 cops injured after bus overturns

JAGDALPUR, 21 APRIL

At least 10 personnel of the Madhya Pradesh police were injured when a bus ferrying them for poll duty overturned in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district on Sunday, a senior official said. A local police official earlier said the injured personnel belonged to the CRPF. Later, a senior police official from Jagdalpur said those injured belonged to the Madhya Pradesh police. The incident took place near Raikot village on Geedam-Jagdalpur road under Geedam police station limits, the official said. After the poll duty in Bastar Lok Sabha seat, where voting was held on 19 April, the security personnel were heading from Faraspal (Dantewada) to Gariband in Mahasamund parliamentary constituency which will go to polls on 26 April, he said. The bus, with 36 personnel from the Madhya Pradesh police onboard, skidded off the road when its driver took a turn in order to save a cattle which suddenly arrived there and the vehicle overturned, he said.

—*PTI*

Govt must release white paper on freebies: Ex-RBI guv

He said public should be made aware of benefits of freebies

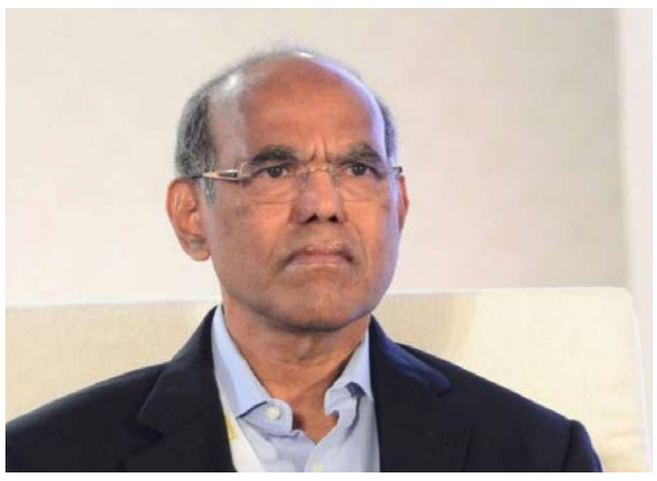
HYDERABAD, 21 APRIL

The Modi government should come out with a 'White paper' to generate consensus among political parties on the issue of giveaways or freebies, former RBI Governor D Subbarao has said.

There has to be a thorough debate on how to impose restraints on political parties in this regard, the former chief of Reserve Bank of India said. The public should be made more aware of the cost and benefits of these freebies and that it is the responsibility of the government to educate the population on this, he added.

"Educate people on the pros and cons of these giveaways or freebies (and ensure) how we can put a restraint on that and how we can enforce it," Subbarao told PTI in a recent interaction.

In a poor country like India, it is incumbent on the government to provide some safety nets to the most vulnerable sections and also introspect as to how far they can be stretched, given the fiscal constraints.



Former RBI Governor D Subbarao has said there has to be debate on how to impose restraints on political parties PHOTO: X

"You should ask (if) it is the best use of this money or we can do something better. So I think we should have a more informed and vigorous debate on freebies and how we can impose some restraint on political parties," he opined.

On some of the states crossing Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) limits, he said states and the central government should maintain fiscal discipline and the FRBM targets should be adhered to.

To a query, Subbarao said that according to the IMF which has done a study, India needs to grow at the rate of 7.6 per cent consistently till 2047 for it to become a developed nation by then. "To maintain a growth rate of 7.6 per cent per year for the next 25 years, a few countries have done it, China has done it, but the more difficult point is whether we can do it with all the challenges like climate change, geopolitics, the difficulty of globalisation. It is difficult to say," Subbarao said.

- To a query, Subbarao said that according to the IMF which has done a study, India needs to grow at the rate of 7.6 per cent consistently till 2047

The former RBI chief said a developed nation will have four pillars- rule of law, strong state, democratic accountability and institutions."We can't say we don't have them, neither can we say we have all of them. So these are the things that we have to nurture and develop," he said.

—*PTI*

IN CHHATTISGARH

Retd IAS officer held in ₹2K cr liquor scam

RAIPUR, 21 APRIL

PHOTO: X

Days after filing a fresh case, the Enforcement Directorate has arrested retired Chhattisgarh Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Anil Tuteja in connection with a Rs 2,000 crore alleged liquor scam linked money laundering case in the state, official sources said on Sunday

The federal agency had detained the 2003-batch officer from the Economic Offences Wing (EOW)/Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) office in Raipur on Saturday evening where the bureaucrat and his son Yash Tuteja had gone to record their statements in the same case.

They were issued summons by the ED at the EOW/ACB office to join the investigation and record their statements following which they were taken to the central agency's office here.The retired IAS officer was questioned and later taken into custody under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Yash Tuteja was allowed to leave after questioning.Anil Tuteja is expected to be produced before a magistrate in the city where the agency will seek his remand, the sources said.The officer retired from service last year. He was last designated as joint secretary in the industry and commerce department of Chhattisgarh. The ED had filed a fresh money laundering case in the alleged liquor scam case after the Supreme Court recently quashed its earlier FIR that was based on an Income Tax Department complaint. The apex court ruled there was no scheduled offence and hence the money laundering case does not stand. —*PTI*

- The retired IAS officer was questioned and later taken into custody under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Yash Tuteja was allowed to leave after questioning

WEDDING TRAGEDY

9 of family die in road crash in Rajasthan's Jhalawar

KOTA, 21 APRIL

Mangled remains of vehicles after a collision between a van and a trolley on NH 52 near Aklera town in Jhalawar district PHOTO: PTI

As many as nine men returning from a wedding died in a road incident in Rajasthan's Jhalawar when the car they were in collided head-on with a truck early Sunday, an officer said.

The men, all of them aged 16-30, were returning from a wedding in Dungri village of Madhya Pradesh.

Among the victims were Rohit, 16, Sonu, 22, and Deepak, 24, all of them brothers, Eklera Police Station SHO Sandeep Vishoni said.

The other victims were identified as Ashok, 24, Hemraj, 33, Ravishankar, 25, and Rahul, 20, all of them from Bagari Mohalla of Jhalawar's Eklera village, he said.

Rohit, 22, and Ramkishan, 20, who too died in the incident, were from Khanpur area of Jhalawar and Harnawda in Baran district.

Manish Bagari, 18, is undergoing treatment in a critical state at a hospital, Vishoni said.

The truck driver was detained and questioned, he said.Deputy Superintendent of Police Hemant Gautam said the car, a Maruti Suzuki Omni, was completely mangled.According to Gopal Bagari, a relative, around 35-40 baraatis had left from Dungri in three Omnis and two pick-ups vehicles at around 12.30am.

On the way, Bagari stopped in Khimchi village on Bhopal road for tea, while the other car sped ahead.

After around 10 minutes break, Bagari resumed his journey, and after a few minutes travel, around 2.15am, found a car in a mangled state stuck in a truck near Pachola village.

The rescuers had to break open the rear gate of the car to bring out the severely injured men, at least two of them were stuck in front. —*PTI*

BIHAR TEACHER RECRUITMENT SCAM: 5 HELD

PATNA, 21 APRIL

The Bihar Police have arrested five more people, including a woman, from Madhya Pradesh, as part of its investigation into the alleged question paper leak of the Teachers Recruitment Exam (TRE)-3 conducted in March, officials said.

According to a statement issued by the Economic Offences Unit (EOU) late on Saturday, "All five accused are part of a gang... have been arrested in Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh). Transit remand has been obtained for bringing them back to Patna."Crucial evidence has been collected from their possession, and they will be produced before a Patna court on Monday, it said.The Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) had cancelled the TRE-3 exam following allegations of paper leak. A new date for the examination will be announced later. The TRE-3 exams were held on 15 March at 415 centres. Around 3.75 lakh aspirants took part in the test. —*PTI*

BJP leader attacked during debate, 1 held

TIKAMGARH, 21 APRIL

PHOTO: X

Two people allegedly attacked a local BJP leader during a poll debate organised by a national news channel in Madhya Pradesh's Tikamgarh, police said on Sunday.

The police have arrested one person in connection with the incident that occurred at a ground in Nazarbag where a news channel organised a debate on Saturday night, an official said.

Representatives from the BJP and Congress, among others, participated in the debate, he said.

The accused, Himanshu Tiwari and Babar, allegedly raised slogans against the BJP and made objectionable remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Kotwali police station in-charge Anand Raj said.

The BJP's district media cell in-charge, Prafull Dwivedi, objected to this, and the duo allegedly threw a chair at him, he said.

Some local leaders intervened to protect Dwivedi, which led to a scuffle, the official said.

Based on Dwivedi's complaint, a case was registered against the alleged accused under sections 499 (defamation), 294 (obscene act), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code, he said.

- Himanshu Tiwari and Babar, allegedly raised slogans against the BJP and made objectionable remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Kotwali police station in-charge Anand Raj said

While Babar has been arrested, a search is on for Tiwari, who is absconding, the official said.

District Congress president Naveen Sahu clarified that the accused had nothing to do with his party, and they were present as spectators.

This is the second such incident during a poll debate organised by news channels in Madhya Pradesh. —*PTI*

BrahMos supplies from India continue to reach Philippines

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Supplies of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles from India to the Philippines under a USD 375 million deal, continue as part of the contract between the two nations, defence officials said.

The missile system supplies reached at an air base in Manila from India in a chartered Ilyushin-76 transport aircraft on Sunday, they said.

Officials from India and the Philippines are receiving the first batch of equipment supplied to that country as part of the contract, defence officials said.

Notably, India delivered the first lot of the supersonic cruise missiles to the Philippines on 19 April, as part of the deal signed in 2022.

The Indian Air Force had sent its American-origin C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft with the missiles to the Philippines to deliver the weapon system to the Philippines' Marine Corps, according to defence sources.

The export of ground systems for the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile system along with the missiles started last month itself, they said.

PHOTO: PTI

The Philippines is taking delivery of the missile systems at a time when tensions between them and China have escalated owing to frequent clashes in the South China Sea. The three batteries of the BrahMos missile system would be deployed by the Philippines in their coastal areas to guard against any threat in the region.

The BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, a joint venture between the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Russian Federation's NPO Mashinostroyeniya, is said to be one of the most successful missile programs in the world. Acknowledged as the foremost and swiftest precision-guided weapon on a global scale, BRAHMOS has played a pivotal role in enhancing India's deterrence capabilities. —*ANI*

₹2 lakh claim of farmer's widow justified: Panel

MUMBAI, 21 APRIL

A consumer commission here has directed an insurance company to pay a claim of Rs 2 lakh under a Maharashtra government scheme to the wife of a farmer who died in a road accident in 2017.

The District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, South Mumbai, in the order passed on 18 April, said the insurance company "failed in its responsibility" given by the state government by rejecting the woman's claim in an "arbitrary" manner.

The complainant, wife of a farmer from Solapur, said her husband died in an accident on 25 November, 2017 while returning home from a vegetable market in the area.

The farmer was severely injured after being hit by a state transport bus. He was rushed to a nearby hospital where doctors declared him dead, as per the complaint.

After coming to know about their policy under the 'Gopinath Munde Farmers Accidental Insurance Scheme' introduced by the Maharashtra government, the woman submitted a claim to the authorities concerned.

However, the insurance company "deliberately" and in a malafide manner did not sanction her genuine claim and this amounted to deficiency in service, the woman said in her complaint and approached the commission.

The Oriental Insurance Company, chosen by the state government through a notification, said the deceased farmer was aged above 75 and hence ineligible to avail the claim.

A farmer between 10 and 75 years of age is eligible to claim benefits under the scheme.

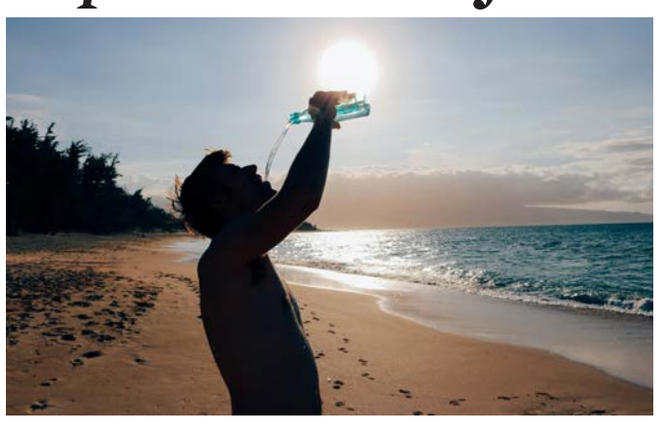
The insurance company further submitted that the claim has been rightly repudiated because documents were submitted after the prescribed time period of 90 days.

The commission, after hearing both the sides and perusal of documents, said that in the police FIR, the birth year of the deceased was written as 1972 and the postmortem report mentioned his age as approximately 70 years. No documentary evidence has been produced by the insurance company to show the deceased was 75 years old, it said. —*PTI*

NEW STUDY FINDS

'2023 proved predictions of warmer world'

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL



Researchers said that in future, more events involving record-breaking hot temperatures occurring earlier in the year PHOTO: PIXABAY

Multiple regions across the world simultaneously experiencing heat extremes could become an "emerging feature" of a warmer planet, according to a new study.

The new research that reviewed the weather and climate of 2023 also said that many of the extreme events experienced last year are consistent with predictions previously made about a warmer world.

Putting the events of the warmest year on record in perspective, researchers said that in a warmer future, more events involving record-breaking hot temperatures occurring earlier in the year, and cyclones exacerbating rainfall extremes are in order.

Change in seasonality of extreme events too is another trend the researchers observed.

"We are seeing extremes appearing in seasons in which they are usually less likely. Heatwaves, for example, appeared in spring 2023 in southwestern Europe, Brazil, Morocco and South Africa," Robin Clark of the Met Office in the UK, a co-author of the study published in the journal Advances in Atmospheric Science, said.

Further, multiple regions across the world simultaneously experiencing heat extremes could become an "emerging feature" of a warmer planet, the researchers said. Many regions of North America, southern Europe, northern Africa, and Asia together experienced record-breaking hot extremes in the month of July last year.

The team also found that intense cyclones exacerbated rainfall extremes such as the Libya flooding in September and the North China flooding in July 2023.

They said that an increased occurrences of such events too are in line with projections about the future under continued global warming.

"Many of 2023's events are consistent with projected future changes in a warmer world, showing the challenges that are to come, while some were a surprise, suggesting there is still more to learn about what's potentially around the corner," Wenxia Zhang from the Institute of Atmospheric Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the lead author of the paper, said.

Droughts in California in the US and the Horn of Africa transitioned into floods in 2023, and more of such events are projected to occur in the coming decades, the authors said.

The compounding effects of drought-to-flood events can be more severe compared to when floods and droughts occur separately, they said.

The researchers also found that wildfires, such as those that occurred in Hawaii and Canada last year, are causing widespread damage, along with threatening emissions targets aimed at limiting global warming.

Ecosystems have come under immense pressure due to wildfires, they said. —*PTI*

MAHAVIR JAYANTI

Jain devotees take part in a religious procession on the occasion of Mahavir Jayanti, in Nagpur, Sunday
PHOTO: PTI

Nearly half of China's major cities are sinking 'rapidly'

One in ten residents of China's coastal cities could be living below sea level within a century, as a result of land subsidence and climate change, according to a paper published in Science today1.

Some 16% of the mapped area of China's major cities is sinking "rapidly" — faster than 10 millimetres every year. An even greater area, roughly 45%, is sinking at a "moderate" rate, the paper says, meaning a downward trajectory of greater than 3 mm annually. Affected cities include the capital Beijing, as well as regional capitals, including Fuzhou, Hefei and Xi'an.

The situation could see one-quarter of China's coastal lands slip below sea level within a few decades, posing "serious threats" to the hundreds of millions of people who live on the coast, the paper notes.

That sinking feeling

"Subsidence is certainly not only a problem in China. Many other parts of the world share the same problem," says Ding Xiaoli, a geodesist at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Subsidence is when land sinks relative to sea level, usually owing to extraction of subsurface water, rock or other resources.

In the famously low-lying Netherlands, roughly one-quarter of the land has subsided to below sea level. And by 2040, almost one-fifth of the world's population is projected to be living on sinking land.

Jakarta has become the most rapidly subsiding capital in the world, prompting Indonesia to propose a new capital city.

In the United States, more than 44,000 square kilometres of land across 45 states has been directly affected by subsidence, with more than 80% of the cases relating to groundwater extraction, often for agricultural purposes.

Ding says that the study provides an interesting snapshot of the situation in China, and crucially links the issue to the populations affected.

16% of mapped area of China is sinking faster than 10 millimeters every year ***PHOTO: X/ @JOSHUAD4708665***

The authors, led by Tao Shengli, a researcher in remote-sensing technology at Peking University in Beijing, assessed 82 cities across China with a population of more than 2 million. They used radar pulses from satellites to measure the changes in the distance between the satellite and the ground to examine how its elevations changed between 2015 and 2022.

They found that the cities facing severe subsidence are concentrated in five regions, and cover both coastal and inland cities.

Also on the list are cities in the largely land-locked southwest, such as Kunming, Nanning and Guiyang — a finding that surprises Zhou Yuyu, a geographer at the University of Hong Kong. "These cities are not as densely populated or industrialized as some other parts of China, yet they still experience significant subsidence," he says.

Losing ground

The paper links a range of natural and human factors to sinking, such as the depth of a city's bedrock, groundwater depletion, the weight of buildings, the use of transport systems and underground mining.

Previous studies2 have found that excessive groundwater extraction is a key cause of severe land subsidence in cities across the world.

But there are also stories of successful mitigation. Tokyo slowed its sinking from a rapid 240 mm a year in the 1960s to about 10 mm a year in the early 2000s, after passing laws that limited groundwater pumping. Shanghai, China, which sank by a staggering 2.6 metres between 1921 and 1965, reduced its annual rate of sinking to about 5 mm after implementing a series of environmental regulations.

"The key to addressing China's city subsidence could lie in the long-term, sustained control of groundwater extraction," the paper says.

Ding says that, in cities such as Macao and Hong Kong where no groundwater is used, subsidence mainly comes from consolidation — downward movement as a result of soil being compressed — after land reclamation.

The authors also listed the weight of buildings as a factor. Contrary to expectations, heavier buildings, such as the skyscrapers in Shanghai, tend to sink slower than lighter structures do, possibly because those buildings are anchored on deeper rock, according to the paper.

Double whammy

As cities sink, global sea levels are also rising, owing to the effects of climate change. This double whammy will cause 22–26% of China's coastal lands to drop below sea level by 2120, the paper says.

Wei Meng, a geophysicist at the Graduate School of Oceanography at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston regards the figures as "terrifying".

In 2022, Wei and his colleagues found that land was sinking faster than sea levels were rising in many coastal cities worldwide. They predicted that these cities would be challenged by flooding "much sooner" than timelines projected by sea-level models if they continued to sink at current rates.

Climate change might exacerbate sinking in other ways, such as by affecting where and when it rains — or doesn't rain. "Increasing droughts can prompt excessive groundwater extraction, contributing to subsidence in urban areas," Zhou says.

Dike systems could be a cost-efficient way to prevent inundation as cities' elevations fall, the paper says.

—BBC News

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SALAR سالار

'India poised to become a science powerhouse'

Science journal 'Nature' has said that India along with being an economic power is also more than ready to take the next step towards becoming a science powerhouse, as it called for a rise in the country's research and development spending, especially from the private sector.

The prestigious British weekly said in its editorial headlined "How India can become a science powerhouse" cited researchers to highlight that basic research has been neglected by successive governments and that a thriving research system needs much greater autonomy.

"Along with being an economic power, India is also more than ready to take the next step towards becoming a science powerhouse. This is not yet a given, but it can happen," it said.

"In this editorial, we discuss a third aspect: how to bridge the funding gap. One thing India's government can do is to boost science spending by encouraging businesses to contribute more, as is the case for other leading economies. If policymakers and industrialists can get this right, an opportunity to put rocket boosters under the country's impressive scientific achievements is there for the taking," the journal said.

The editorial noted that in 2021-22, according to government data, India had the world's third-largest pharmaceutical industry by volume and was the leading supplier of affordable medicines and generic drugs, some of which were "crucial" to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide.

India is also an economic power in the world ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

Last year, India became the fourth country ever to achieve a soft landing on the Moon and the first to land near the lunar south pole, it said, adding that the country also has the world's largest constellation of remote-sensing satellites.

The magazine said India is among the world's most prolific countries in terms of research output after the United States and China.

From 2014 to 2021, the number of universities increased from 760 to 1,113. In the past decade, seven more Indian Institutes of Technology have been established, raising the total to 23. In the same period, two new Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research were also established.

"Now consider that these gains were achieved by a nation that spent just 0.64 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on research and development (R&D) during 2020-21," it said.

Whichever political formation is elected to power in the ongoing polls, it must consider how to increase the country's R&D spending, as well as what could be achieved with more money, it said.

Nature said around 60 per cent of India's research spending can be traced to central and state governments and universities, and around 40 per cent to the private sector. In comparable nations, there is often much more private-sector funding.

"In 2022, the private sector contributed, on average, 74 per cent of OECD nations' R&D spending and 66 per cent of such funding for the 27 members of the European Union. India today has many global companies in construction, information technology, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and more.

—PTI

India became fourth country to achieve a soft landing on Moon ***PHOTO: X/ @VARSHAPARMAR06***

Ayurveda: Ancient tradition that aligns mind, body and spirit

- Ayurveda eliminate the root cause of disease, revive and rejuvenate the body, and ensure health and longevity

Ayurveda originated in India more than 3,000 years ago, and the southern state of Kerala is at the heart of this ancient medicine system's renaissance.

On a holiday to Kerala on India's south-western Malabar Coast, Shilpa Iyer decided to visit Kotakkal, a town that became famous after the establishment of Arya Vaidya Sala, Kerala's best-known centre for the practice of Ayurveda, in 1902. Seven days later, she left the historical treatment centre after completeing panchakarma, a cleansing and rejuvenating programme for the body, mind and consciousness.

Panchakarma, a holistic Ayurvedic therapy, involves a series of detoxifying procedures. It integrates herbal medicines, cleansing therapies, personalised diet plans and wellness activities to eliminate the root cause of disease, revive and rejuvenate the body, and ensure health and longevity.

Iyer says she left "feeling lighter, healthier and better than ever before".

Derived from the Sanskrit words "ayur" (life) and "veda" (science or knowledge), Ayurveda translates to "knowledge of life" and originated in India more than 3,000 years ago. It is based on the ideology that health and wellness depend on a delicate balance between the mind, body, spirit and environment, and places great emphasis on preventive strategies rather than curative ones.

The ancient system of medicine is centred on the idea of universal interconnectedness between prakriti (the body's constitution) and doshas (life forces). Varied combinations of the five elements — aakash (sky), jal (water), prithvi (earth), agni (fire) and vayu (air) – create the three doshas.

.Kerala is the first place in India to receive monsoon, and Keralites call the rainy season oushada maasam, "the medicinal season". "It is the time when they go in for annual rejuvenation treatments. Even the elephants in Kerala are given a break from their work schedule and fed with specially prepared medicinal food," Nooh says.

Keralites call the rainy season Oudhsda Masam, the medicinal season ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

He also notes that Kerala's moist climate and fertile soil is conducive for the growth of traditional medicinal plants and herbs used in the practice. "The dense tropical forests of Kerala have a wealth of herbs and medicinal plants used to make the extracts and elixirs prescribed by Ayurveda," he adds.

The small state has more than 100 Ayurvedic government-run hospitals, 800 Ayurvedic pharmaceutical factories and 800 Ayurvedic medicine dispensaries. As many as 120 holiday resorts and private wellness centres offer specialised treatments such as kasti vvasti, an oil-based treatment for back pain and inflammation in the lumbosacral region; elakkizhi, a treatment with heated herbal poultices to tackles aches, pains and muskoskeletal trauma; njavara kizhi, a massage therapy for arthritis or chronic musculoskeletal discomfort; and shirodhara, a restorative therapy to ease stress and anxiety and that involves pouring warm, medicated oil over the forehead.

Most treatment centres offer therapies and treatments for a range of health issues, including immunity, mental health, anxiety, pain management, weight loss, skin and health care, sleep issues, psoriasis, eczema, eye care, arthritis, sciatica, gastric problems and paralysis.

The fact that Ayurveda places great emphasis on preventive strategies and encourages the maintenance of health through close attention to balance in one's life, resonates with people tired of a fast-paced existence and the problems that brings.

According to Reji Raj, general manager and senior Ayurveda consultant at Amal Tamara, a luxury Ayurveda resort in Kerala, Covid-19 also fuelled interest in the practice, both nationally and internationally, due to its focus on periodic cleansing to restore and maintain the body's delicate balance.

In fact, Kerala has seen a 15% increase in the number of domestic travellers visiting the state for Ayurvedic treatments since November 2021. And while international travellers have long flocked to Kerala for its beaches and backwaters, cuisine and ecotourism initiatives, the state is seeing a surge in visitors coming for wellness tourism at many Ayurvedic centres.

Demand is so high that in August 2023, the Indian government introduced the Ayush (AY) visa – a new category of visa to facilitate travel for foreign nationals seeking treatment under traditional systems of medicine. (Ayush is an acronym for ayurveda, yoga and naturopathy, unani, siddha and homeopathy, the six traditional systems of medicine practised in India.) Of these, Ayuveda remains the most popular. According to a 2024 report by Market Research Future, the global Ayurveda market size, pegged at $8bn in 2022, is likely to grow from $9.2bn in 2023 to $26.16bn in 2032. "

Modern medical institutes in Kerala now offer special packages that combine leisure with wellness. Most of these Ayurvedic spas and resports are located in stunning and secluded sites and offer a chance to unwind and detox; others even curate cultural and food experiences, including tours of spice farms, heritage walks, visits to old churches and more.

—BBC News

PHOTO: FINANCE MINISTRY

IMF team to visit country next month: Pak Fin Min

ISLAMABAD, 21 APRIL

Pakistan's Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has said that an IMF team is expected to visit Islamabad next month to negotiate a new long-term bailout package to secure a staff-level agreement for the cash-strapped country by mid-July. Speaking to the media after his week-long visit to Washington, the minister said the contours of the new International Monetary Fund programme will shape up later. "We will start getting into the granularity of the programme by mid-May," Dawn News quoted Aurangzeb as saying on Saturday. Pakistan has made a formal request to the IMF to seek the next bailout package in the range of USD 6 to USD 8 billion with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing. *—PTI*

Indian-origin man in race to win London Mayor place

LONDON, 21 APRIL

The Indian-origin candidate in the race to challenge Sadiq Khan from winning a third term as London Mayor says the citizens of the UK capital have been let down by all major political parties and that he wants to run London like a "seasoned CEO" who delivers profits for all. Delhi-born Tarun Ghulati believes his experience as a businessman and investment expert is what London needs to revive its fortunes as the "global bank of the world" by attracting the investment it needs. The 63-year-old is standing as an Independent candidate among 13 contestants in the fray for the local elections on 2 May when Londoners will vote for their Mayor and also for members of the London Assembly. "I view London as a unique global city, akin to the 'global bank of the world' where diverse cultures converge to flourish," Ghulati said. *—PTI*

2 Japanese navy helicopters crash in Pacific Ocean

TOKYO, 21 APRIL

Two Japanese navy helicopters carrying eight crew members crashed in the Pacific Ocean south of Tokyo during a nighttime training flight after possibly colliding with each other, the country's defence minister said on Sunday. One crew member who had been recovered from the waters was later pronounced dead, while rescuers searched for seven others who were still missing. The two SH-60K choppers from the Maritime Self Defence Force were carrying four crew each and lost contact late Saturday near Torishima island about 600 kilometers (370 miles) south of Tokyo, Defence Minister Minoru Kihara told reporters. *—AP*

3rd channel opens after Baltimore bridge collapse

BALTIMORE, 21 APRIL

A third temporary channel for boats to enter and depart the Port of Baltimore has opened, expanding further shipping access as collapsed sections of the Francis Scott Key Bridge are salvaged before the span can ultimately be rebuilt. The alternate channel, located to the northeast of the fallen bridge, is open to "commercially essential vessels," port officials announced late Friday. The new temporary path, with a controlling depth of 20 feet (6.1 meters), a horizontal clearance of 300 feet (91.4 meters) and a vertical clearance of 135 feet (41.2 meters), allows a greater variety of vessels to access the port while crews work to reopen the main channel, Coast Guard and port Capt. David O'Connell said in a news release. With the new channel open, about 15% of pre-collapse commercial activity will resume, O'Connell said. *—AP*

US passes crucial aid deal worth $61bn for Ukraine

The Senate is expected to pass it within the next few days

WASHINGTON, 21 APRIL

The House of Representatives has finally approved billions of dollars in new US military aid for Ukraine to help combat Russia's invasion.

The much-delayed measure had vocal opponents in Congress and it took a fragile bipartisan deal to get the $61bn (£49bn) package through. Republicans said more than a third would be dedicated to replenishing weapons and ammunition. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the US support as "vital".

The aid would keep the war from expanding and save thousands of lives, he added. It is unclear when the aid will arrive. The package will now go to the Senate, which is expected to pass it within the next few days before President Joe Biden signs it into law.

Alongside replenishing weapons and ammunition systems, Ukraine will also receive more than $9bn (£7.28bn) of economic assistance in the form of "forgivable loans" - ones that do not need to be paid back.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the aid would keep the war from expanding and save thousands of lives *PHOTO: X/@DEFENCEU*

Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Since then tens of thousands of people, mainly soldiers, have been killed or injured on both sides, and millions of Ukrainians have had to flee their homes. Ukraine, which relies on Western weapons, desperately needs the aid as it struggles to contain invading Russian troops, who have been making steady advances in recent weeks.

It has meant Ukrainian soldiers are running low on munitions and having to ration artillery shells on a front line more than 1,200km (745 miles) long. Cheers and applause erupted in the House when the measure passed, by 311 votes to 112, with some Representatives waving Ukrainian flags.

Welcoming the result, Biden praised the bipartisan effort to "answer history's call" and urging the Senate to approve it quickly "so that I can sign it into law and we can quickly send weapons and equipment to Ukraine to meet their urgent battlefield needs".

Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the significant boost in aid would supplement the tens of billions of assistance being provided to Ukraine by European allies.

"Ukraine deserves all the support it can get against Russia," EU chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel said in a joint statement.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the package would "make the United States of America richer, further ruin Ukraine and result in the deaths of even more Ukrainians". *—BBC News*

The first strike killed a man, his wife and their 3-year-old child, according to Kuwaiti Hospital *PHOTO: X/@KSDKNEWS*

Israeli strikes on southern Gaza of Rafah kill 18

RAFAH, 21 APRIL

Israeli strikes on the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight killed 18 people, including 14 children, health officials said on Sunday, as the United States was on track to approve billions of dollars of additional military aid to its close ally.

Israel has carried out near-daily air raids on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million has sought refuge from fighting elsewhere. It has also vowed to expand its ground offensive to the city on the border with Egypt despite international calls for restraint, including from the US.

The House of Representatives approved a $26 billion aid package on Saturday that includes around USD 9 billion in humanitarian assistance for Gaza.

The first strike killed a man, his wife and their 3-year-old child, according to the nearby Kuwaiti Hospital, which received the bodies. The woman was pregnant, and the doctors managed to save the baby, the hospital said. The second strike killed 13 children and two women, all from the same family, according to hospital records. An airstrike in Rafah the night before killed nine people, including six children.

The Israel-Hamas war has killed over 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, devastated Gaza's two largest cities and left a swath of destruction across the territory. Around 80 per cent of the population have fled their homes to other parts of the besieged coastal enclave, which experts say is on the brink of famine.

The conflict, now in its seventh month, has sparked regional unrest pitting Israel and the US against Iran and allied militant groups across the Middle East. Israel and Iran traded fire directly earlier this month, raising fears of all-out war between the long-time foes.

Tensions have also spiked in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Israeli troops killed two Palestinians who the military says attacked a checkpoint with a knife and a gun near the southern West Bank town of Hebron early Sunday. The Palestinian Health Ministry said the two killed were 18 and 19 years old, from the same family. No Israeli forces were wounded, the army said.

—AP

BY-ELECTIONS

Pakistan: Polling begins on 21 nat'l & provincial seats

ISLAMABAD, 21 APRIL

Polling began on Sunday on 21 national and provincial seats in the by-elections in Pakistan amidst tight security and suspension of cellular and internet services in specific districts of Punjab and Balochistan to maintain law.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan, voting began at 8 am and would continue without any break until 5 pm with the provision that voters present within the premises of polling stations would be allowed to cast votes even after the expiry of official timing.

The general elections were held across the country on 8 February to elect representatives for the national assembly and four provincial assemblies. Polls were however cancelled for one National Assembly seat, two Punjab Assembly seats and one seat of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

Apart from these, candidates who won more than one seat opted for only one after elections, leaving the Election Commission of Pakistan to organise by-election on 21 seats, including five national and 16 provincial assembly seats. A day earlier, the federal government announced that cellular services will remain temporarily suspended in specific districts of Punjab and Balochistan during the by-elections. The request for suspension was made by the ECP. The Pakistan Tele communication Authority (PTA) in a statement said the decision was taken to safeguard the integrity and security of the electoral process.

By-elections are being held on two seats of National Assembly each in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and one seat in Sindh while polling began on twelve seats of Punjab Assembly and two each of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan assemblies.

The prime minister retained his NA-123 seat in the National Assembly. Elaborate security measures have been taken by authorities to control the law and order situation with deployment of regular army troops to maintain peace during the day-long process of by-elections. *—ANI*

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan, voting began at 8 am *PHOTO: X/@NEWSBOXERDOTCOM*

Antony Blinken *PHOTO: PTI*

US SECY BLINKEN SET TO VISIT CHINA NEXT WEEK

WASHINGTON, 21 APRIL

At a time when China's friendliness towards Russia is seen as a growing threat among many nations, the upcoming visit of the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, to Beijing next week, is not seen as something that would do much to agendas the two countries have on their plates, according to analysts. The meeting, expected by US as 'breakthrough' on various prospects, according to the analysts, would not have any major advances emerge from it, reported Voice of America.

Blinken's second visit to China coincides with the US warning China not to support Russia in its conflict with Ukraine, given that Chinese companies are directly supplying vital parts to Russia's defence industry.

The State Department lists counternarcotics, enhancing military-to-military communication, holding discussions on the hazards and safety of artificial intelligence, and looking at methods to improve people-to-people ties as additional urgent issues on the agenda.

According to Voice of America, a senior State Department official said in a briefing Friday that the US is "realistic and clear eyed about the prospects of breakthroughs" on any of the issues on the agenda. However, some analysts said they do not anticipate any major advances to emerge from the talks. Analysts, as per Voice of America, speculate that the US may impose sanctions on Chinese institutions that assist in the transfer of these items. Washington has imposed sanctions on Chinese nationals and businesses in the past that give Russia tangible support, and it is seeking the help of its European allies to implement similar restrictions now.*—ANI*

Thousands protest in Spain's islands over tourism

The protests started at noon on Saturday, and an estimated 57,000 people participated *PHOTO: EPA*

MADRID, 21 APRIL

Tens of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets of the Canary Islands in Spain to call for changes to the mass tourism model that they claim is overtaking the Atlantic archipelago, according to Al Jazeera.

The protests started at noon on Saturday, and an estimated 57,000 people participated, according to reports in Spanish media that cited the central government's emissary in the islands.

The demonstrators waved flags, as they crowded the streets of the main towns on each of the seven islands in the archipelago, holding signs with messages like "A moratorium on tourism," according to Al Jazeera. "Canary Islands are not up for sale," and "Respect my home," the slogans read. Approximately twenty social and environmental organisations called for the protests, claiming that the overcrowding of tourists feeds an unsustainable business model that hurts both the environment and local people.

They have suggested an eco-tax to safeguard the environment, a tourism moratorium, and a crackdown on the sale of houses to non-residents in order to pressure the authorities into limiting the number of tourists.

Spain's Canary Islands, an archipelago of 2.2 million people, were visited by nearly 14 million foreign tourists in 2023, up 13 per cent from the previous year, Al Jazeera reported, citing the official data. The authorities in the islands are concerned about the impact on locals.

Meanwhile, the President of the Canary Islands Fernando Clavijo stated on Friday that he was "proud" of the area's status as a top travel destination in Spain, but he also noted that additional restrictions were required as the industry' sgrowth is on a boom. *—ANI*

Taiwan to exercise its air control rights

TAIPEI, 21 APRIL

- The Civil Aviation Administration of China announced that it will begin operating the eastbound W122 and W123 flight paths linking the M503 flight route, which stretches north-south down the middle of the Taiwan Strait, to the Chinese cities of Fuzhou and Xiamen

Taiwan will continue to exercise its right to control air traffic around its airspace after China unilaterally launched two flight paths in the Taiwan Strait, Central News Agency (CNA) reported, citing a national security source.

On 18 April, the Civil Aviation Administration of China announced that it will begin operating the eastbound W122 and W123 flight paths linking the M503 flight route, which stretches north-south down the middle of the Taiwan Strait, to the Chinese cities of Fuzhou and Xiamen, respectively.

The Chinese aviation authority's decision came after Beijing unilaterally cancelled an offset along the M503 flight path on 1 February, which began in 2015 without holding talks with Taiwan, CNA reported.

The "offset" refers to an agreement reached between Taiwan and China in 2015 to move the M503 path 11 kilometres to the west of its original position, which came 7.8 kilometres close to the median line of the Taiwan Strait.

Taiwan's Civil Aviation Administration has voiced concern regarding the W122 and W123 flight paths jeopardizing flight safety, considering their closeness to the Taiwan-controlled Kinmen and Matsu islands. Even though westbound traffic on those flight paths has been permitted since 2018.

Dozens of domestic flights operated regularly between the island of Taiwan and airports in Kinmen and Matsu, which just lie off the coast of the Chinese province of Fujian, according to CNA report. *—ANI*

LOOKING FOR A SAFE SHELTER

US migrant crisis shifts to California

CALIFORNIA, 21 APRIL

On a blustery morning last month, volunteer Adriana Jasso raised the flaps to a tent propped up against the massive steel bars of the fence that straddles this stretch of the US-Mexico border. On her side, plastic tables were piled with apples, packets of hot chocolate, mylar blankets and stacks of ponchos - supplies waiting for hungry and tired migrants who had travelled for weeks, or even months, to reach California.

On the other side, visible through the gaps in the towering barrier, a group of more than 100 people - from countries including Ecuador, Colombia, China and Rwanda - huddled together, waiting to be let through on to US soil.

A group of more than 100 people from countries including Ecuador, Colombia, China and Rwanda huddled together to reach US soil *PHOTO: BBC*

This border point south of San Diego is now one of the busiest along the entire US-Mexico frontier, which stretches around 1,950 miles (3,140km) from here to eastern Texas and the Gulf of Mexico.

A record surge of illegal border crossings in recent years has fuelled the debate over immigration and border security, emerging as a key voter concern ahead of the US presidential election in November. While the border crisis has mostly centred on Texas, where Republican Governor Greg Abbott has waged a fight with President Joe Biden over his immigration policies, recent figures show the geography of the US migration problem is shifting west to border states like Arizona and California. *—BBC News*

Pakistan deports over 800 Afghan refugees: Report

KABUL, 21 APRIL

Over 800 Afghan refugees were deported from Pakistan via the Torkham and Spin Boldak crossings, Khaama Press reported on Sunday.

As per a Khaama Press report, a total of 837 Afghan refugees were forced to return to Afghanistan over the past 48 hours, confirmed by officials on Saturday. Of these, 90 families, or 468 people, returned over the Torkham crossing, according to the Taliban-led Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation.

In a similar manner, 369 people, or 67 families, crossed the Spin Boldak crossing to return, Khaama Press reported. The situation for Afghan refugees in the nation is still terrible, nevertheless, in spite of these efforts. Numerous people continue to struggle with issues including lack of a roof over their head, restricted access to necessary services like healthcare and education, and susceptibility to prejudice and exploitation. Additionally, the recent launch of the Pakistani government's second phase of deporting illegal refugees has added to the plight of Afghan refugees, exacerbating their already precarious situation and heightening concerns about their well-being and safety. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

THDC aims to make Rs 12Kcr thermal power project

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

State-owned THDC India Ltd aims to make its coal-based power plant operational by September 2024, marking an entry into the domestic thermal energy sector, a top company official said. At present, the Uttarakhand-based entity has an installed power generation capacity of around 1,587 MW, of which 1,424 MW is hydro, 113 MW wind and 50 MW solar. Sharing the details of the project, the official further said the foundation stone for the project As per allocation of power by the Ministry of Power, 64.7 per cent of the power generated (854 MW) is to be supplied to UP and balance to other beneficiaries. Several other project related works like boiler light up of Unit 1, have been achieved. *—PTI*

Indian Biogas Association joins hands with HAI

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Indian Biogas Association (IBA) has partnered with Hydrogen Association of India (HAI) to promote bio-based energy solutions with a special emphasis on green and blue hydrogen. This strategic alliance will facilitate comprehensive measures -- including training, capacity building, and policy advocacy -- directed towards catalysing the promotion and advancement of bio-based energy solutions with a special focus on green and blue hydrogen. With a shared objective of minimising the country's reliance on imported energy sources, the MoU marks commitment to joint efforts in propelling sustainable energy initiatives forward. The agreement is focussing on harnessing synergies from both associations, thereby catalysing the continued growth of the growing bio-based energy sector. This collaborative approach aims to leverage government initiatives. *—PTI*

Gems, jeweller exports in FY24 dip by 12.17 pc

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

Gems and jewellery exports declined by 12.17 per cent to Rs 2,65,187.95 crore (USD 32,022.08 million) during 2023-24, compared to the previous financial year due to high interest rates in the US and slow recovery in China, Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) data showed. Gems and jewellery exports in FY23 stood at Rs 3,01,925.97 crore (USD 37,646.17 million), according to GJEPC data. The overall exports of Cut and Polished diamonds declined by 25.23 per cent during FY24 to Rs 1,32,128.29 crores (USD 15,966.47 million) compared to Rs 1,76,716.06 crores (USD 22,046.9 million) for the same period of previous year. According to the provisional export of total gold jewellery witnessed a growth of 20.57 per cent at Rs 92,346.19 crore (USD 11,140.780 million) in FY24 against Rs 76,589.94 crore (USD 9,538.84 million) in the previous year. Provisional gross export of silver jewellery dipped by 43 per cent in FY24. *—PTI*

Middle East crisis: Foreign investors turn net sellers

They have cumulatively sold stocks worth Rs 5,254 crore

FPIs have cumulatively sold stocks worth over Rs 5,254 crore according to NSDL reports PHOTO: FREEPIK

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have turned net sellers in Indian stocks lately, as the ongoing geopolitical crisis in the Middle East likely pushed investors to take money off their portfolios.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), who continued to remain net buyers for the third month until a few days ago in April, have cumulatively sold stocks worth Rs 5,254 crore, National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) showed.

They had aggressively sold Indian stocks and turned net sellers in the Indian equity market in January 2024, before turning net buyers thereafter. In February and March, they were net buyers.

Firm GDP growth forecasts, inflation at manageable levels, political stability at the central government level, and signs that the central bank is done tightening its monetary policy have all contributed to painting a bright picture for the Indian economy.

India's GDP grew at a massive 8.4 per cent during the October-December quarter of the current financial year 2023-24, and the country continued to remain the fastest-growing major economy, and is poised to maintain its growth trajectory going ahead.

To put it into context, the entire year saw an inflow of about Rs 171,107 crore, and notably, over one-third of it came in December. The strong inflow of funds from foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) had then supported the benchmark stock indices to march towards all-time highs.

Before November, FPI participation in Indian stocks was lukewarm, and they had turned net sellers. They sold Rs 14,768 crore and Rs 24,548 crore in September and October, respectively.

Before that, FPIs bought Indian stocks worth Rs 7,936 crore, Rs 11,631 crore, Rs 43,838 crore, Rs 47,148 crore, Rs 46,618 crore, and Rs 12,262 crore in March, April, May, June, July, and August respectively, data showed.

—ANI

SIX VALUED FIRMS TAKE RS 1.40L CR HIT IN MCAP

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

The combined market valuation of six of the top 10 valued firms eroded by Rs 1,40,478.38 crore in a holiday-shortened week, with IT majors Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys taking the maximum hit.

Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 1,156.57 points or 1.55 per cent. Stock markets were closed on Wednesday on account of Ram Navami.

While Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) were the gainers from the top-10 pack, TCS, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Infosys, ITC and Hindustan Unilever suffered erosion in their valuation.

The market valuation of TCS tanked by Rs 62,538.64 crore to Rs 13,84,804.91 crore, the most among the top 10 firms.

Infosys faced an erosion of Rs 30,488.12 crore from its valuation which stood at Rs 5,85,936.45 crore.

Reliance Industries added Rs 4,397.82 crore taking its valuation to Rs 19,90,195.52 crore and the mcap of LIC advanced Rs 1,201.75 crore to Rs 6,15,453.90 crore. *—PTI*

Direct tax collections jump 18pc in FY24

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

India's net direct tax collections surged by a massive 17.7 per cent year-on-year to Rs 19.58 crore in the fiscal year ended March 2024, surpassing even revised estimates by a wide margin, the tax department said on Sunday.

Net collections of income and corporate taxes, which make up for most of the direct taxes, in 2023-24 financial year exceeded the Budget estimates by Rs 1.35 lakh crore (7.40 per cent) and the revised estimates by Rs 13,000 crore.

The government had raised the target for direct tax collection in FY24 (April 2023 to March 2024) to Rs 19.45 lakh crore in the interim Budget presented on February 1.

With this, the gross tax collection target as per the revised estimate stood at Rs 34.37 lakh crore for FY24.

While gross direct tax collections (provisional) for the FY 2023-24 rose 18.48 per cent to Rs 23.37 lakh crore, net proceeds (after accounting for refunds) surged 17.7 per cent to Rs 19.58 lakh crore, reflecting buoyancy in the economy and rise in income levels of individuals and corporates.

Refunds aggregating to Rs 3.79 lakh crore have been issued in FY 2023-24, the CBDT said in a statement.

The gross collection (provisional) of Direct Taxes (before adjusting for refunds) for the FY 2023-24 stood at Rs 23.37 lakh crore, showing a growth of 18.48 per cent over the gross collection of Rs 19.72 lakh crore in FY 2022-23.

Even the indirect tax collection for FY24 has exceeded the revised estimates (RE) of Rs 14.84 lakh crore by "a handsome margin", helped by a record GST mop-up. *—PTI*

Government had raised the target for direct tax collection in FY24 in the interim budget PHOTO: FREEPIK

IRDAI removes age limit on health insurance policies

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

With a view to widen the market and foster adequate protection from healthcare expenses, insurance regulator IRDAI has removed the age limit of 65 years for individuals buying health insurance policies.

This marks a significant departure from the conventional constraints that limited individuals in securing comprehensive coverage.

By abolishing the maximum age restriction on purchasing health insurance plans, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) aims to foster a more inclusive and accessible healthcare ecosystem, ensuring adequate protection against unforeseen medical expenses.

As per the earlier guidelines, individuals were allowed to purchase a new insurance policy only till the age of 65. However, with the recent amendment, which has been effective from April 1, anyone, regardless of age, is eligible to buy a new health insurance policy.

IRDAI aims to foster inclusive healthcare ecosystem PHOTO: FREEPIK

Travel policies can only be offered by general and health insurers, it said.

There is no limit on AYUSH treatment coverage. Treatments under systems like Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy will receive coverage up to the sum insured without any cap, it said.

Policyholders with benefit-based policies can file multiple claims with various insurers, enhancing flexibility and options, it said. The proposed regulation seeks to handle the complaints and claims of senior citizens.*—PTI*

FPIs withdraw over Rs 5,200 crore in April

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Foreign investors dumped domestic equities worth over Rs 5,200 crore in April so far on concerns over tweaks in India's tax treaty with Mauritius, which would now impose higher scrutiny on investments made here via the island nation.

This came following a staggering net investment of Rs 35,098 crore in March and Rs 1,539 crore in February, data with the depositories showed.

According to the data with the depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) made a net outflow of Rs 5,254 crore in Indian equities this month (till April 19).

The major trigger for FPI selling was the tweak in India's tax treaty with Mauritius, which would now impose higher scrutiny on investments made in India via the island nation, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

Apart from equities, FPIs withdrew Rs 6,174 crore from the debt market during the period under review.

According to the data with the depositories, FPIs withdrew Rs 325 crore from Indian equities this month (till April 5) PHOTO: PTI

Foreign investors invested Rs 13,602 crore in March, Rs 22,419 crore in February, and Rs 19,836 crore in January. This inflow was driven by upcoming inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index. Overall, the total inflow for this year so far stood at Rs 5,640 crore in equities. *—PTI*

Vedanta fined Rs 3.48 cr for tax evasion

New Delhi, 21 April

A penalty worth Rs 3.48 crore has been imposed on mining company Vedanta in a case pertaining to input tax credit during the periods 2018-19 and 2019-20, the company informed stock exchanges in a filing on Sunday. GST and Central Excise Commissionerate, Rourkela sent the notice. The Company said it now intends to file an appeal against the said order with the appellate authorities. "The Company is hopeful of a favourable outcome thereof and does not expect the said Order to have any material financial impact on the Company,." In explanation for the delay in disclosure, the Company said it was in the process of assessing the reasons for the penalty order and examining its veracity. *—ANI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

'Rural sales contribution hits record this fiscal'

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Hyundai Motor India expects sales contribution from rural areas to remain at record levels in the current fiscal as well on account of various factors including anticipation of a favourable monsoon, according to a senior company executive.

The country's second-largest automaker, which sells models like Creta and Venue, reported 11 per cent growth in rural areas last fiscal as compared to 4 per cent in urban centres.

Hyundai Motor India registered its highest ever total sales of 7,77 876 units in 2023-24 with a year-on-year growth of 8 per cent over the 2022-23 fiscal. The company also reported the highest-ever domestic sales since inception of 6,14,721 units in FY24.

He noted that to capitalise on the momentum of rural growth, the automaker has implemented a range of initiatives, including Grameen Mahotsav, improved collaborations with financiers, showroom-on-wheels, etc.

—PTI

Hybrid mutual funds stage comeback; see Rs 1.45 lakh crore inflows driven

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Hybrid mutual fund schemes have seen a resurgence in 2023-24, garnering Rs 1.45 lakh crore in investments, driven by substantial inflows into the arbitrage category, following withdrawals in the previous fiscal year.

The surge in assets was complemented by an increase in the number of investors, with the number of folios reaching 1.35 crore in March 2024 from 1.21 crore a year earlier, adding an investor base of 14 lakh. This shows investors' inclination for hybrid funds.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Hybrid funds are mutual fund schemes that typically invest in a combination of equity and debt securities and sometimes in other asset categories such as gold.

The category has been attracting regular inflows since the beginning of financial year 2023-24 in April after a change in taxation for debt funds that kicked off in the same month. Before that, the segment saw a net withdrawal of Rs 12,372 crore in March.

Indexation takes into account inflation during the holding period of a mutual fund unit and consequently increases the purchase price of the asset and this reduces the tax. *—PTI*

Q4 EARNINGS

Global trends to drive market this week

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Worries related to the Iran-Israel conflict, quarterly earnings and foreign investors' trading activity are the key factors that would dictate stock markets this week, analysts said.

Besides, trends in Brent crude oil and movement of the rupee against the dollar will also be crucial factors.

This week will be crucial for the market amid ongoing worries about the conflict between Iran and Israel, said Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

"If tensions escalate significantly, there's a risk of panic selling and increased volatility across global stock markets. Moreover, the market will be keeping a close eye on fluctuations in crude oil prices, as geopolitical events frequently impact them.

"Investors will also be watching for important earnings of Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finance, Nestle, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies and Maruti," Gour said.

HDFC Bank on Saturday reported a 2.11 per cent growth in consolidated net profit to Rs 17,622.38 crore for the March 2024 quarter against Rs 17,257.87 crore in the preceding December quarter.

Worries related to Iran conflict is a factor for market PHOTO: FREEPIK

Among global events, the Bank of Japan will announce its interest rate decision on April 26, 2024, he added.

"Movement in US bond yields and the dollar index will be important factors influencing market sentiment," Gour said. Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 1,156.57 points or 1.55 per cent and the Nifty dipped 372.4 points or 1.65 per cent.

This week focus will remain on earnings season along with global cues, said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd.

Markets edged lower amid excessive volatility and lost over one and a half per cent, tracking feeble global cues, said Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research. *—PTI*

Retailers body to seek govt intervention on POCO

HYDERABAD, 21 APRIL

South Indian Organised Retailers Association is planning to seek the central government's intervention with regard to the business practices of POCO, a sub-brand of Xiaomi, alleging that the cell phone manufacturer is avoiding the supply of phones to mainline channels.

In a statement, the ORA claimed that the business methods of the firm are a clear indication of POCO's attitude to minimise spending by reaching the product through online and "illegitimate" channels without providing consumer experience.

The retailers body also said that POCO is not contributing to employment generation in India, as the brand operates with just three distributors and "no sales promoters" in stark contrast to other major smartphone brands like Samsung, VIVO, and OPPO.

These actions by POCO not only harm the legitimate sales channels but also result in financial losses to the government exchequer. In addition, ORA is prepared to file a case with Competition Commission of India (CCI) *—PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Messi scores twice, Inter Miami beats Nashville SC 3-1

MANCHESTER, 21 APRIL

Lionel Messi scored twice to increase his Major League Soccer-leading total to seven and also had an assist to lead Inter Miami over Nashville SC 3-1 on Saturday night. Messi had his second two-goal game in MLS after scoring two against Orlando on March 2. He has a goal or assist in each of the six league matches he's played, missing four because of injury. Sergio Busquets scored his first goal with Miami since joining former Barcelona teammate Messi last summer.Miami (5-2-3, 21 points) is unbeaten in five matches against Nashville since Messi's arrival. Miami also remained in first place in the Eastern Conference. For the second consecutive week, Miami allowed a goal in the opening minutes when an own goal by Miami defender Franco Neri put Nashville ahead. *—AP*

Arsenal back at top after beating Wolves in PL

BISHKEK, 21 APRIL

Arsenal moved back to the top of the Premier League by beating Wolverhampton Wanderers 2-0 at Molineux on Saturday. Late goals in each half by Leandro Trossard and Martin Odegaard secured the win. Mikel Arteta's team rose one point ahead of second-placed Manchester City, which beat Chelsea 1-0 in an FA Cup semifinal. Victory ended a painful week for Arsenal, which lost ground in the title race.*—AP*

Flop show by India's wrestlers at Asian qualifiers

BISHKEK, 21 APRIL

India's Greco-Roman wrestlers cut a sorry figure at the Asian Olympic Qualifier here on Sunday as none of them could secure a berth for the Paris Games. Sunil, competing in the 87kg category, was the only Indian who managed to win a bout while others were eliminated after losing their first rounds.Sunil beat a tough Japanese rival Soh Sakabe 5-1. The Indian got the opportunity from the 'Par Terre' position and logged four points with two gut-wrench moves. In his quarterfinal against Uzbekistan's Jalgasbay Berdimuratov, the Indian saved himself brilliantly after being lifted by his rival from the ground position and even led the bout for some time.*—PTI*

PHOTO: AP

Rybakina strolls to Stuttgart title in straight-sets win

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Elena Rybakina had little trouble in seeing off Marta Kostyuk 6-2, 6-2 to win the Stuttgart Open on Sunday, her third title this year. Rybakina adds the Stuttgart title to her wins in the Brisbane International and the Abu Dhabi Open this year. For Kostyuk, this was her second final defeat of 2024 after she lost the decider of the San Diego Open in March.The Kazakhstani fourth seed broke to love in the opening game and cruised to the first set, breaking again to make it 5-2 *—AP*

With 4 goals in 31 mins, Palace beat West Ham

It took just seven minutes for the first goal to arrive for Palace

LONDON, 21 APRIL

Crystal Palace blew West Ham United away on Sunday afternoon, as goals from Michael Olise, Ebere Eze, an own-goal, and Jean-Philippe Mateta (two) saw the Eagles ran out 5-2 winners at Selhurst Park.

After a performance of the highest quality against Liverpool at Anfield – one recognized by the League Managers' Association as the best of the game – Palace had plenty of wind beneath their wings for the arrival of David Moyes' West Ham United side. It showed. In a first-half of near perfection, Palace were first to every loose ball, snapping into tackles, shifting the ball forwards quickly, finding runners – and sprawling all over their east London opposition.

It took just seven minutes for the first goal to arrive for Palace – and it was a sign of the bombardment on the West Ham goalmouth to come. After Ebere Eze – influential in the playmaker role – had seen his first corner cleared, a clever interchange of passes with Michael Olise and Adam Wharton on the edge of the box gave Joachim Andersen the space to clip in a cute cross. Olise – following it in – made contact before the onrushing Lukasz Fabianski, glancing into the unguarded net. Moments later, it should have been two. A long ball forward from Muñoz was brought down superbly by Eze on the edge of the box, and he slipped in Tyrick Mitchell on the overlap. The full-back cut back onto his right foot but, with just Fabianski to beat, lashed over. The ground was rocking and the chances kept coming. Eze was next to go close with a low effort from a distance as Palace found space in the West Ham half-time and again – but he would not be denied with the Eagles' next opening. *—AP*

Goals from Olise, Ebere Eze, an own-goal, and Jean-Philippe Mateta (two) saw the Eagles run out 5-2 winners at Selhurst Park **PHOTO: AP**

Everton beat Forest to move 5 points

LONDON, 21 APRIL

Everton boosted their Premier League safety hopes with a hard-earned 2-0 win over relegation rivals Nottingham Forest. Superb long-range strikes from Idrissa Gueye and Dwight McNeil, plus a magnificent save from Jordan Pickford, settled a relegation six-pointer in Everton's favor at Goodison Park. Following Luton Town's heavy defeat by Brentford on Saturday, the Toffees took full advantage to move five points clear of the relegation zone with five matches remaining.Sean Dyche's side – who face Merseyside rivals Liverpool in midweek – stay 16th.

—AP

RCB as they succumbed to an agonizing one-run defeat to KKR **PHOTO: PTI**

IPL: KKR sneak home by 1 run against RCB at Eden

KOLKATA, 21 APRIL

Fast half-centuries by Will Jacks and Rajat Patidar were not enough for Royal Challengers Bengaluru as they succumbed to an agonizing one-run defeat to Kolkata Knight Riders in their IPL match here on Sunday.

Jacks (55, 32b, 4x5, 5x6) and Patidar (52, 23b, 3x4, 5x6) kept RCB in the hunt but they could not chase down a daunting 223 target set by the KKR.

RCB ended up at 221 all out despite a last-over blitz by Karn Sharma (20, 7b, 3x6).

Andre Russell grabbed three wickets (3/25) while Sunil Narine and Harshit Rana grabbed two wickets apiece for the home side.

Earlier, skipper Shreyas Iyer's composed half-century and opener Phil Salt's initial blitzkrieg enabled KKR to score 222/6.

Salt smashed 48 off 16 balls while skipper Iyer scored 50 off 36 balls. Ramandeep Singh (24) and Andre Russell (27) took the KKR total past the 220-run mark.

Cameron Green was the most successful bowler for RCB with figures of 2/35.

Brief Scores: KKR: 222/6 in 20 overs (Shreyas Iyer 50, Phil Salt 48; Cameron Green 2/35) beat RCB: 221 all out in 20 overs (Will Jacks 55, Rajat Patidar 52, Karn Sharma 20).

—PTI

MI seek revenge against RR

JAIPUR, 21 APRIL

A resurgent Mumbai Indians will need to address their bowling woes as they look to exact revenge on table-toppers Rajasthan Royals in their reverse fixture of the Indian Premier League here on Monday.

With three wins in the last four games, MI has hit the recovery road to reach the sixth spot in the points table after a poor start this season, while RR is on a rampaging run as they occupy the top spot with 12 points.

The five-time champions survived a late onslaught from Ashutosh Sharma to eke out a nine-run win over Punjab Kings in the last game.

It was once again Jasprit Bumrah, who was left to do the heavy lifting as he stood out with his three wickets. The star India pacer shone with the new ball and then returned to produce a breakthrough, and he did all this without conceding much.

With 13 scalps, Bumrah tops the list of the most wickets this IPL. He also has the second-best economy of just under six runs but while he has been on the mark, his bowling colleagues have struggled.

Gerald Coetzee, too, has made an impact with 12 wickets but has gone for runs. But Akash Madhwal and skipper Hardik Pandya have been inconsistent.

While Shreyas Gopal has taken a wicket each in the three games he has played so far, MI also needs to use the experience of veteran Afghanistan all-rounder Mohammed Nabi as a bowler.

With three wins in last four games, MI have hit the recovery road to reach sixth spot in the points table **PHOTO: PTI**

In batting, former skipper Rohit Sharma's scintillating century, albeit in a losing cause, has been the highlight, while Ishan Kishan has been inconsistent. Hardik, too, hasn't made much of an impact so far, while Tilak Verma has done moderately well.

A huge positive for MI is Suryakumar Yadav's return to form. His 53-ball 78 against PBKS was the cornerstone of MI innings and on his day he can destroy any attack.

The last time MI faced the RR bowling unit, they looked like a rabbit caught in the headlights, as Trent Boult removed three of their top-order batters for naught and the veteran left-arm pacer will again be a massive threat.

Avesh Khan has been entrusted with the responsibility of bowling at the death and he has done well. Kuldeep Sen, too, showed his skills but he needs to work on his economy.*—PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

MUMBAI INDIANS vs RAJASTHAN ROYALS

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Sawai Mansingh Stadium, Jaipur

Olympic selection: Manu, Anish eye second win

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Manu Bhaker and Anish Bhanwala set themselves on course for a second successive win in the ongoing Olympic Selection Trials 1 & 2, topping their respective qualification rounds at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting range here on Sunday.

Manu shot an aggregate of 585 in the women's 25m pistol in T2 qualification to lead the five-woman field into the final in pole position. The Olympian had won the T1 trials on Saturday.

Esha Singh followed her in second with 581, while Simranpreet Kaur Brar was third with 577.

Abhidnya Ashok Patil with 572 and Rhythm Sangwan, the second Paris Olympic quota holder in the field along with Manu, with 566, brought up the rear.

In the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol T2, odds-on favorite Bhanwala continued to dominate proceedings, topping the qualification round with a score of 582.

Manu Bhaker **PHOTO: PTI**

His fellow Paris quota holder Vijayveer Sidhu was second with 580, while Bhavesh Shekhawat was third on the same score as Vijayveer, but with lesser inner 10s.

Ankur Goel (573) and Adarsh Singh (571), barring a miracle in the final two trials in Bhopal, look out of the reckoning.

As things stand, Manu and Esha in the women's pistol and Anish and Vijayveer in the men's RFP are likely to take the flight to Paris from these events.

World number six Casper Ruud defeated Stefanos Tsitsipas 7-5, 6-3 to win the Barcelona Open on Sunday **PHOTO: AP**

Aditi Ashok **PHOTO: AP**

GOLF: ADITI TIED-64 AT CHEVRON CHAMPIONSHIP

TEXAS, 21 APRIL

Aditi Ashok was tied 64th among the 73 players who cut the third round at the Chevron Championship here.

She had disappointing rounds of 75-71-73 to be 3-over 219 at the Par-73 Woodlands course, while the third round could not be completed as dangerous conditions suspended the round.

Thailand's Atthaya Thitikul (69-67 and 3-under through 12 holes) was leading at 11-under, while Canada's Brooke Henderson (71-71 and 8-under through 17 holes) was making the most of moving day with an 8-under round heading into her final hole.

Henderson was 10-under, as was Nelly Korda (68-69 and 3-under through 11 holes in the third round). *—PTI*

FORMULA 1 CHINESE GP

Verstappen canters to victory

SHANGHAI, 21 APRIL

In an electrifying return to Shanghai's Formula One circuit after a five-year hiatus, Max Verstappen secured victory in the Chinese Grand Prix on Sunday, marking his fourth win in five races of the 2024 season. The Red Bull driver's dominance was underscored by a comfortable pole-to-flag performance, leaving his rivals in the dust.

Verstappen's triumph was not without its surprises, as McLaren's Lando Norris clinched an unexpected second place, denying Red Bull the coveted one-two finish. The Dutchman's victory, coupled with his earlier triumph in the season's inaugural Saturday sprint, solidified his position at the top of the championship standings.

His Mexican teammate, Sergio Perez, once a formidable contender, trailed behind in third place, now lagging 25 points behind Verstappen in the championship race. The dry conditions of the race, punctuated by two safety car periods, kept the competition intense, with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz claiming fourth and fifth places respectively.

Mercedes' George Russell secured a commendable sixth place, while Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin clinched seventh, earning an additional point for the fastest lap. Verstappen's victory marked his 58th career win, making Shanghai the 26th circuit where he has emerged victorious.

Reflecting on his stellar performance, Verstappen remarked, "It felt amazing. All weekend I think we were incredibly quick. It was just enjoyable to drive. The car was basically on rails and I could do whatever I wanted to with it." *—PTI*

Red Bull driver Max Verstappen of the Netherlands celebrates on the podium after winning the Chinese Formula One Grand Prix at the Shanghai International Circuit, Shanghai, China on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

- In an electrifying return to Shanghai's Formula One circuit after a five-year hiatus, Max Verstappen secured victory in the Chinese Grand Prix on Sunday, marking his fourth win in five races of the 2024 season. The Red Bull driver's dominance was underscored by a comfortable pole-to-flag performance, leaving his rivals in the dust.

WFI to conduct fresh trials for World Qualifiers

NEW DELHI, 21 APRIL

Unhappy and concerned at the Indian men's team's below-par show at the Asian Olympic Qualifiers, the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) on Sunday decided to conduct fresh trials to pick the Indian team for World Qualifiers which will be the last chance to secure quota places for the Paris Olympic Games.

Out of 18 possible quota places, India has earned only four, and all through women wrestlers, including Vinesh Phogat. The others who have earned quotas for the quadrennial extravaganza are Antim Panghal (53kg) Anshu Malik (57kg), and Reetika (76kg). There are still 14 categories left and winning at the World Qualifiers, starting 9 May in Turkey, will be a tougher task compared Asian Qualifiers held in Bishkek.

The WFI will conduct trials in all these 14 categories -- two in women (68, 62) and six each in men's freestyle and Greco-Roman styles in either the last week of April or in the first week of May."President Sanjay Singh discussed the performance with India's coaches and selection committee members and they agreed that this performance was really below par and unacceptable. It has never happened that India has struggled to get a quota even in freestyle," said a source."

It has been decided WFI will conduct trials in all 14 categories where the quota has not been secured," added the source.Asked if fresh trials will be conducted in categories where India has already locked or send the quota winners to Paris, the source said, "It will be decided later.""Probably after the Turkey Qualifiers, a decision will be made on that," he added.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI